REVEALED

The Benko Gambit Revealed is the second in a new and innovative series of books. Using fresh, clear presentation, the key ideas of the openings are explained in an entertaining and accessible way. The aim of this series is to provide the essential knowledge to play the opening, while at the same time revealing the current thinking of the world's top players. For example, 'First Moves' leads readers through the basic opening moves. 'Heroes & Zeroes' gives the best and worst performances with the opening and features some of the leading exponents of the Benko Gambit. 'Tricks & Traps' reveals how you might catch out your opponent. 'What's Hot' pinpoints the very latest ideas from the world's elite. Detailed variations are given at the end of the book, summarizing the main lines with assessments.

Named after the Hungarian/American player Pal Benko, who pioneered the opening, the Benko Gambit has long been a favourite of dynamic tournament chessplayers. With this opening Black is not attempting to equalize. A pawn is sacrificed in a bid to seize the initiative from the outset.

Neil McDonald is an International Grandmaster, prolific chess author and trainer. He is noted both for the lucidity of his writing as well as his extensive theoretical knowledge. He is author of *The King's Gambit, Mastering Chess Tactics*, and *Chess: The Art of Logical Thinking*.

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THE BENKO GAMBIT

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NEIL McDONALD

BATSFORD

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Contents

Introduction

The Benko is one of the most exciting responses to 1 d4.
As early as move three Black spurns defence in favour of
counterattack. A tense middlegame is in prospect which often
turns on its head conventional chess thinking about the value of
a material advantage.

This book is also going to be something of a roller coaster ride.
Reading about the heroes of the Benko will send you away with
a warm glow thinking that you have discovered an opening that
wins every time against 1 d4. After that the Strategy chapter will
bring you back down to earth as you'll see that White actually
has his chances too. Then in 'What's Hot' we'll examine the
most promising recent lines for both White and Black.
The Tricks and Traps chapter in essence shows how not to play
the Benko as Black, but the Test Positions section, with its
emphasis on Black's dynamism, gives you the chance to redress
the balance. Finally the Details chapter gives an objective
summary of the current state of Benko theory.

At times you'll be thinking that 3...b5 just blunders a pawn, at
other moments that White has been crazy to weaken himself
with 3 d5. But that is the wonderful thing about the Benko:
the player who shows the greatest strategical understanding and
tactical imagination can make his opponent look very silly
indeed, whether he is White or Black. I hope this book succeeds
in revealing the inner workings of this wonderful opening.

Neil McDonald
Gravesend
May 2004

First Moves

Welcome to the wonderful world of the Benko Gambit.
We'll begin with a quick run through of the opening moves so
that everything is nice and clear.

1 d4

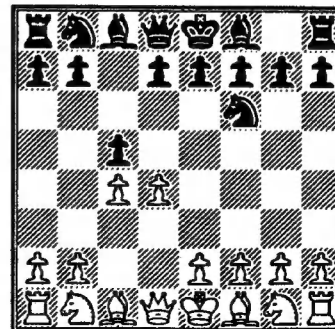White uses his first move to stake a claim for the c5 and e5
squares.

1...♘f6

In reply Black develops and gains control of e4.

2 c4

Unable to play 2 e4, White settles for the second best way to
build a pawn centre and takes hold of the d5 square. If 2 ♘f3
we would have reacted in the same way with 2...c5 3 d5 b5.
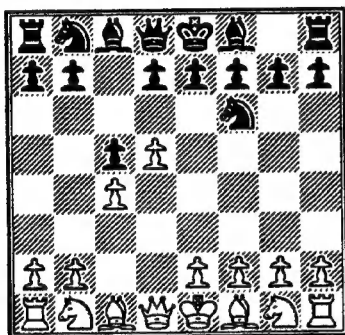More will be said of this variation at the end of the next chapter.

2...c5

The first direct confrontation after an initially peaceful carve up of centre territory. This pawn stab amounts to a challenge to White's hold on d4, as well as c5 and e5 – three dark squares in the centre.

3 d5

If instead 3 dxc5? e6 Black regains the pawn with ♗xc5 when he has a lead in development. A fairly common alternative is 3 ♘f3, avoiding the Benko, when 3...cxd4 4 ♘xd4 gives us a line of the English.

With 3 d5 White concedes a loosening of his dark squares, but on the other hand he now has a space advantage and intends to build upon it by setting up a formidable light square pawn chain in the centre. Everything else being equal, an advantage in terrain confers greater mobility on a player's pieces and therefore gives him more chances to find or carry out a strong plan.
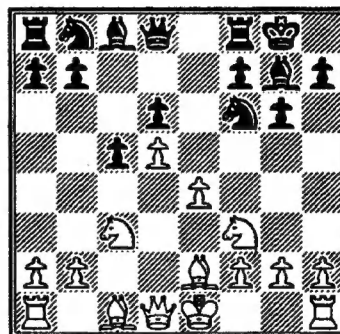
Now 3...e5 is playable, the so-called Czech Benoni; but after 4 ♘c3 d6 5 e4 White's space advantage is set in stone. Black wants more excitement than this from his chess.

If you want to be hyper-critical of White's opening moves you could say that he has systematically weakened his control of the diagonal a1-h8. The squares b2 and c3 have no more chance of pawn cover after the three consecutive blunders 1 d4?, 2 c4? and 3 d5?? The last of these moves is of course doubly criminal as it leaves the pawn out on a limb on d5 and was the last chance to avoid the Benko with 3 ♘f3!
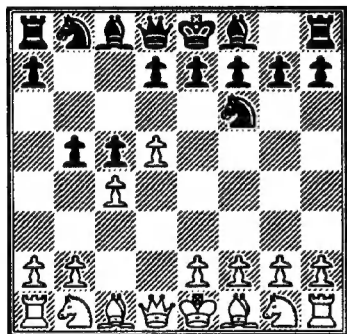
While this is of course a (slight) exaggeration, it explains why many players as Black would be itching to get their king's bishop onto g7. It is a dream diagonal, all the more so as the alternative route out via e7 is hampered by Black's own pawn on c5.

However, the immediate 3...g6 is just too passive as White is allowed to build up unimposed in the centre after 4 ♘c3 ♗g7 5 e4. So Black has tried 3...e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 ♘f3 ♗g7 8 ♗e2 0-0.

This is the Modern Benoni. White still has his space advantage in the centre, but Black can put him under pressure in various ways, such as ♖e8 and ♗g4. Black will try to stabilise the centre and then build up counterplay on the queenside based on preparing the b7-b5 pawn advance with moves such as ♖b8, a7-a6 and even ♕a5. This pawn advance would be awkward for White and so he does his best to restrain it by playing a2-a4 and keeping a couple of pieces with their sights aimed at the b5 square.
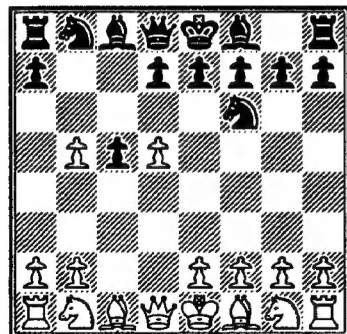
As White is so keen to prevent b7-b5, what happens if Black plays 3...b5 straightaway?

If you had asked a player of the 1920s what he thought about 3...b5 he would have replied simply 'it loses a pawn'. If you had asked David Bronstein in the 1950s he would have muttered something about the Volga Gambit and a bad endgame. Today, however, the reply would probably be 'you mean the Benko Gambit? A very interesting opening'.

Yes, we have arrived at the subject of our book: the Benko Gambit. With 3...b5 Black gets in his favourite pawn move before it can be restrained by ♘c3.

3...b5! 4 cxb5

White is by no means obliged to accept the pawn, though of his alternatives 4 ♘f3 is the only move that sets any real problems.

4...a6

The point. Black clears the deck of pawns on the queenside to open lines for his pieces.

5 bxa6

A critical moment. Whereas accepting the first pawn at move four is more or less de rigueur for White, he has been rather fussy in his choice of moves at this point. His alternatives range from the ultra solid 5 b6, just handing back the pawn, to the rather crazy 5 ♘c3 axb5 6 e4 b4 7 ♘b5. But here we'll follow the mainline as it reveals in clear style what Black is trying to achieve with his pawn sacrifice.

5...g6!

A second pawn sacrifice? No, the pawn on a6 is as doomed as a mouse in a snake's cage. The point of the immediate 5...g6 is that Black wants to stop White putting his bishop on b2 by retaining for a move the option of ♘xa6. This reasoning will be explained in detail in the Strategy chapter.

6 ♘c3

White almost always puts his knight on c3 in the Benko Mainline. It helps shield the b2 pawn, supports e2-e4 and guards the d5 pawn.
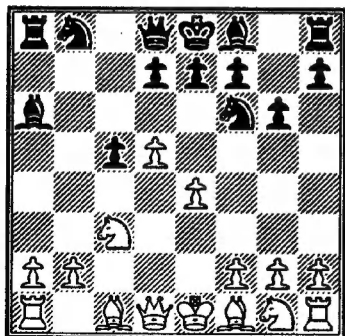
6...♗xa6

It was imperative to recapture now as dallying with 6...♗g7 allows 7 e4 ♗xa6 8 ♗xa6. White gets to exchange bishops on his own terms without losing the right to castle. As well as this, Black would have to contend with ideas of 9 e5.
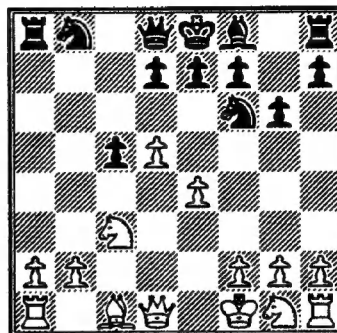
7 e4

A very big decision as it waives the right to castle. Instead White often fianchettos his bishop on g2 with 7 ♘f3 ♗g7 8 g3 followed by ♗g2 and 0-0.

Almost always 7 ♘f3 d6 8 e4 amounts to the same thing, but the immediate 7 e4 is slightly more popular.

7...♗xf1

Of course Black takes the chance to exchange bishops and stop White castling. Or is it so obvious? Looking at some early games in the Benko, I see that Black sometimes declined to play ♗xf1 when given the chance, evidently believing that after 7...♗g7 9 ♗xa6 ♘xa6 the fact that he had got his knight out quickly was more important than stopping White castling. Such a view seems faintly preposterous, as the inconvenience caused by preventing White from castling is, in the long term, of far greater significance than getting the knight to a6 – where it may not even prove well placed compared to d7. I guess that when the Benko was first being tested, Black was anxious to play in normal gambit style, which entails rapid development: hence the rush to put the knight on a6. It was only when the opening had become more sophisticated that it was realised Black didn't have to attack straightaway. Remember that the compensation for the pawn is positional, not tactical.

8 ♔xf1

8...d6

The move d7-d6 is good in principle, and is beyond criticism in this specific variation, as it stops e4-e5 or d5-d6 ideas and solidifies Black's centre. But in other situations it can be a serious loss of time, as well as an unnecessary weakening, if

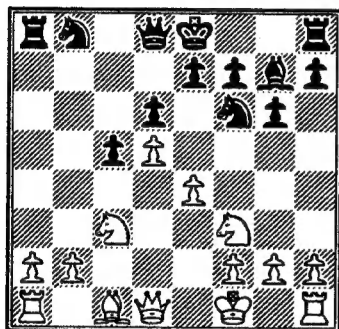Black plans to counterattack in the centre with e7-e6.
To misquote Pillsbury's comment on castling, Black should play d7-d6 because he wants to or because he has to, not just because he can.

9 ♘f3

A sound developing move before deciding what to do with the white king.

9...♗g7

At last the black bishop gets to its dream square.

10 g3

Another way to remove the king from the centre is via g1 and h2: 10 h3 0-0 11 ♔g1 ♘bd7 12 ♔h2.

It takes one move longer to get the king to h2 but he looks significantly more secure there than on g2. Against this strategy Black should aim for pressure on the queenside, as counterattacking in the centre with e7-e6 would be much less effective with no white king to target on g2. As a plus for Black, a white breakthrough in the centre with e4-e5 would be less threatening with the king on h2 due to possible tricks down the b8-h2 diagonal.

10...♘bd7

Black attends to his development. The experience of many decades has revealed that it is better to have the knight here than on a6. On d7 it not only dissuades an e4-e5 advance but is ready to go to b6 to take part in active opearations on the queenside.

11 ♔g2

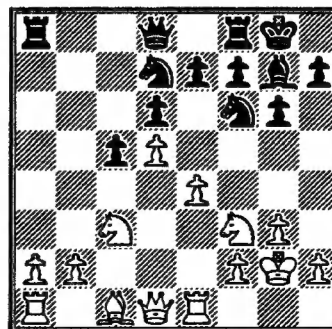The white king clears the way for the rook on h1 to come to the centre.

11...0-0

...and the black king gets out of the way of the rook on h8. One of the good features of the Benko Gambit is that the black king is not often a direct target as he is well shielded by the fianchetto bishop.

12 ♖e1

The best square for the rook where it defends e4 and backs up a possible e4-e5 advance in the future.

12...♕a5

A key moment: a major alternative was to put the queen on a8 (after a preparatory ♖a6) and then try to bash through in the centre with e7-e6.
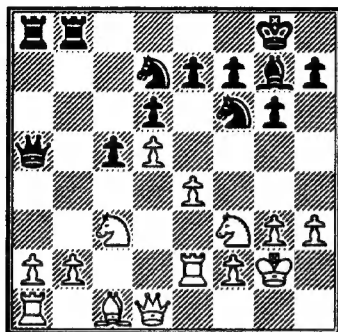
13 h3

White often plays this move as a matter of course to prevent ideas of ♘g4 and ♘ge5 'freeing' Black's game. But to be honest such a knight manoeuvre doesn't look very appetising for Black anyway.

13...♖fb8

Black completes his development. The king's rook is drawn like a magnet to b8. Rooks normally only achieve such active posts as a8 and b8 in the latter stages of the middlegame: the opening and early middlegame usually feature a struggle between the minor pieces, with only a small contribution from the rooks.

14 ♖e2

In contrast to the aggressive black rooks, one white rook is still sleeping on a1 while the other is needed to bolster the defences along the second rank.

14...♘e8!

A defensive, manoeuvring and attacking move rolled into one.
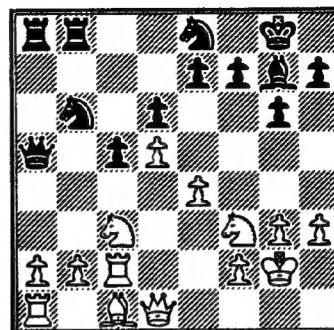
Defensive: the retreat unleashes the bishop which helps to deter e4-e5. *Manoeuvring*: the knight heads off to b5 via c7 to join the queenside attack. *Aggressive*: the threat is 15...♗xc3.

15 ♖c2

The versatile rook now bolsters the defence of c3 as well as b2. White is suffering indignities but he hopes one day he might have the last laugh. His idea is to regroup carefully and patiently until the moment is right to spring out of his defensive role and seize the initiative in the centre or even exploit the passed pawn.

15...♘b6

From here the knight might go to a4 to challenge the white knight on c3, which is the chief barrier to the attack on b2. Black's pieces are well placed for queenside action, but the white structure is holding firm.

We have traced the course of a typical Benko game for the first 15 moves and familiarised ourselves with some of the basic ideas. This discussion will be continued in greater depth in the chapter on strategy. But first of all we'll consider the history of the Benko and how a true understanding of this ingenious opening has gradually evolved.

Heroes and Zeros

Studying the games of the pioneers of an opening can be the best way to uncover its secrets. Back in the mid 1970s, when the Benko first became fashionable, players of White were not only unaware of the most sophisticated responses to the gambit but were often just plain confused. Therefore Black was frequently able to demonstrate his plans in a clear and staightforward manner, meeting little resistance. The result was a mass wipe-out which has lent posterity a series of so-called model or text book games.

However, the story in this chapter begins way before the 1970s.

The first hero is Capablanca, the Cuban Grandmaster who was World Champion from 1921-27. If the definition of genius is to be well ahead of your time, then Capablanca was perhaps the greatest ever in the field of chess. His games anticipate the discoveries of theory by at least thirty years. After all, consider this: he was playing proto-type King's Indians at Havana in 1913; he used a Modern Benoni set up to crush Alekhine like a child with Black at New York in 1927; and here is how he had played thirteen years earlier against Nimzowitsch at St.Petersburg.

A.Nimzowitsch – J.Capablanca,
St Petersburg 1914

Of course the opening moves have nothing whatsoever to do with the theory of the Benko, but the pawn offer Capablanca makes at move eight is perfectly in accordance with its spirit.

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♗b5 d6 5 d4 ♗d7 6 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 7 ♕d3 exd4 8 ♘xd4 g6

'A novel idea' writes Capablanca 'brought on by the spur of the moment, with the intention of putting White on his own resources and out of the normal forms of this defence with which Nimzowitsch was very familiar'.

A remarkably casual way to decide on a positional sacrifice which wouldn't be understood by the chess world at large for 50 years!

9 ♘xc6 bxc6 10 ♕a6

The clever tactician Nimzowitsch has seen a way to win a pawn and create a passed pawn! In 1914 this would have seemed an excellent idea.

10...♕d7 11 ♕b7 ♖c8 12 ♕xa7 ♗g7 13 0-0 0-0 14 ♕a6

Having grabbed her booty the white queen runs back to the centre.

14...♖fe8 15 ♕d3 ♕e6 16 f3

An experienced modern player would look at the pawn structure and recognise the features of the Mainline Benko Gambit: the two open files on the queenside for Black's rooks, the compact black pawn centre and the long range bishop on g7. He or she would probably also conclude that this is a good

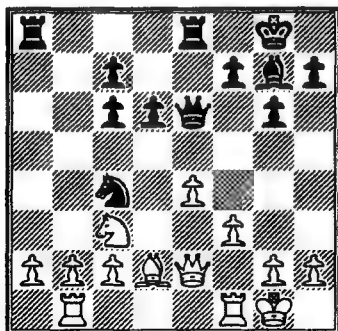version of the Benko for Black: in particular the pawn on c6 is guarding the d5 square – a luxury Black is without in the normal Benko structure. The modern player may not have actually seen the games of Pal Benko and Lev Alburt and other great Benko players of the 1970s, but modern theory has been built upon their legacy – that is why it is possible to assert that Black has at least fully adequate compensation for the pawn in the diagram above.

But what could Nimzowitsch have known of this back in 1914, in a chess world that was only one generation away from the age of the King's Gambit? According to the values of the age he was a sound pawn up, with no weaknesses in his position – in other words he was winning. One can just imagine Nimzowitsch's total confusion and despair as the win appeared to slip through his fingers – and not just the win, but the draw as well! The game continued:

16...♘d7!

The knight begins a manoeuvre to c4 to attack White's queenside pawns.
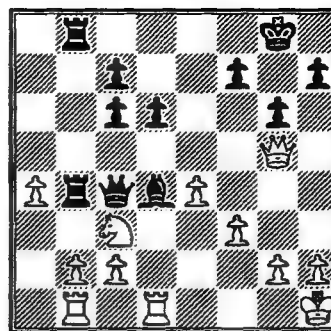
17 ♗d2 ♘e5 18 ♕e2 ♘c4 19 ♖ab1 ♖a8

Now the black rooks take up their correct stations.

Capablanca plays the position like a strong modern Grandmaster – there is nothing old fashioned about his play. In contrast, Nimzowitsch has no idea how to coordinate his pieces in this exotic position, mainly because he is playing under the assumption that he has a clear advantage. Here for example he might have tried 20 b3, as recommended by Capablanca, though it would be hard to accept that after 20...♘xd2 21 ♕xd2 ♖a3, intending ♕e5 to drive away the knight, he would sooner or later lose the extra pawn and have to defend for a draw.

20 a4 ♘xd2 21 ♕xd2 ♕c4 22 ♖fd1

Here it was imperative to jettison the a-pawn with 22 ♘e2, as now the far more important b2 pawn becomes indefensible.

22...♖eb8 23 ♕e3 ♖b4 24 ♕g5 ♗d4+ 25 ♔h1 ♖ab8!

Keeping up the positional pressure is far stronger than cashing in with 25...♗xc3?. Once the b2 pawn drops the white knight will find itself with no safe square, to say nothing of the c2 pawn. Therefore Nimzowitsch elects to give up the exchange, but the rest is a massacre.

26 ♖xd4 ♕xd4 27 ♖d1 ♕c4 28 h4 ♖xb2 29 ♕d2 ♕c5 30 ♖e1 ♕h5 31 ♖a1 ♕xh4+ 32 ♔g1 ♕h5 33 a5 ♖a8 34 a6 ♕c5+

35 ♔h1 ♕c4 36 a7 ♕c5 37 e5 ♕xe5 38 ♖a4 ♕h5+ 39 ♔g1 ♕c5+ 40 ♔h2 d5 41 ♖h4 ♖xa7 42 ♘d1 and finally **White resigned.**

Capablanca himself makes a very interesting comment at move 13.

'Nimzowitsch, it is true, does not make the best moves now, but I believe he has been unjustly criticised for losing this game, although none of the critics have given a satisfactory line of procedure. They have all suggested moves here and there; but the games of the great masters are not played by single moves, but must be played by concerted plans of attack and defence, and these they have not given.'
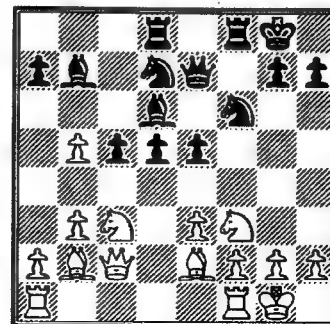
[*My Chess Career*, Dover 1966]

As will be seen in the examples in this book, one of the joys of the Benko Gambit for Black is that it presents him with a clear strategical plan – his pieces find active squares one after another, including the queen's bishop which is often the bane of Black's life in 1 d4 openings. In contrast, White often faces difficulties in grasping what to do, just as Nimzowitsch did in the game above. Therefore I believe that the Benko Mainline is easier to play on the black side – the theoretical assessment doesn't agree with this, as a chess machine like Kramnik will play flawlessly and win as White, but for the rest of us chess is a battle, and the easier it is to know what we are supposed to be doing, the better.

In some ways the game above is a neglected, misunderstood masterpiece. I have a book by Max Euwe, World Champion 1935-7 in which he claims that Capa simply blundered the pawn. Furthermore, the game doesn't appear in Golombek's book *Capablanca's 100 Best Games*. Nor does Chernev mention it in his writings. It seems that none of Capa's biographers dared to give this game in their books as they didn't understand it.

The concept of sacrificing the b-pawn to achieve a big centre was known at the time. For example at Bad Pistyan in 1922 Alekhine beat Tarrasch with Black with the Blumenfeld Gambit:

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 c5 4 d5 b5!? 5 dxe6 fxe6 6 cxb5 d5 7 e3 ♗d6 8 ♘c3 0-0 9 ♗e2 ♗b7 10 b3 ♘bd7 11 ♗b2 ♕e7 12 0-0 ♖ad8 13 ♕c2 e5 etc.

and the black pawns advanced all the way to d3 and e4.

What was special about the Capablanca game was that Black was playing *positionally on the queenside*, not trying for a pawn advance in the centre after deflecting the white pawn from c4. That is the true ethos of the Benko Gambit, at least in its Mainline form – smooth, efficient development with a view to queenside pressure whilst keeping the status quo in the centre. The Benko Gambit first appeared in a familiar form in a couple of games in the 1930s, but didn't make much impression on the chess world at large. Thereafter the little known Russian chess player Argunov analysed various gambit lines in the magazine *Chess in the USSR* in 1946 including **1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 e6**.

Argunov lived in Kuibyshev on the banks of the river Volga, and for this reason the gambit has been known until the present day in Russia and Russian speaking lands as the Volga Gambit. This is

a curiosity, and was perhaps rather vexing for Mr. Argunov. The only other opening I believe that is named after water is the Saragossa Opening – 1 c3.

To be honest I don't know anything about Argunov and haven't seen his articles, so I don't know whether he is a hero or not.

The next certain hero is David Bronstein, for playing the Benko Gambit at the Candidates tournament in 1953, and then writing notes to the game in a brilliant book. This was a mammoth 28 round event and Bronstein played the Benko in the first round, explaining: 'I did not want to begin this tournament with the sort of protracted defence Black is usually forced to put up with in one of the 'normal' lines.' Alas, this was the only time he played it in the tournament, though he succeeded in winning in good style.
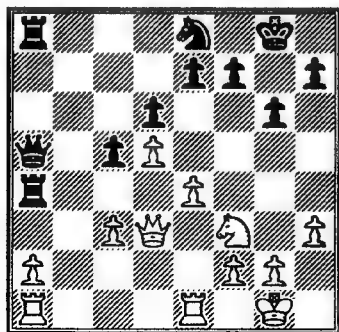
M.Taimanov *White*
D.Bronstein *Black*
Candidates Tournament Zurich 1953

The opening moves were:

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 g6 4 ♘c3 d6 5 e4 b5 6 cxb5 ♗g7 7 ♘f3 0-0 8 ♗e2 a6 9 bxa6 ♗xa6 10 0-0 ♕c7 11 ♖e1 ♘bd7 12 ♗xa6 ♖xa6 13 ♕a2 ♖fa8 14 h3 ♘b6 15 ♗g5 ♘e8 16 ♗d2 ♘a4 17 ♘xa4 ♖xa4 18 ♗c3 ♗xc3 19 bxc3 ♕a5 20 ♕d3

Here Bronstein played **20...♕a6!** and makes the following comment in his famous book on the Zurich 1953 Candidates Tournament [English translation, Dover 1979]
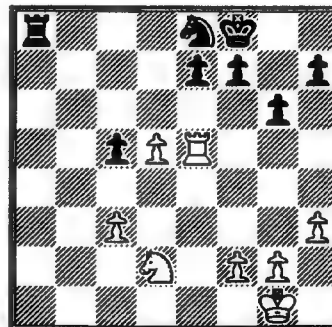
'Black's endgame advantage is founded on the fact that his base pawn at e7 is close to home and therefore easy to defend, while the white pawns at c3 and e4 afford excellent targets to Black's rooks. If the e-pawn advances, then the pawn on d5 becomes weak'.

Note that Bronstein doesn't rush into 20...♖xa2 21 ♖xa2 ♕xa2 when 22 e5 gives White active play. The game continued...

21 ♕d2 ♖xa2 22 ♖xa2 ♕xa2 23 e5?

This can only ever be a good idea if the queens are still on the board. Therefore White should have kept it in reserve and played a move such as 23 ♕e3. Black would have a slight advantage after say 23...♘f6 but the permanent threat of dynamic play from White would mean that his loose pawn structure is of far less consequence.

23...♕xd2 24 ♘xd2 dxe5 25 ♖xe5 ♔f8!

Exactly. A recurring theme in Benko endgames is that the black king can contribute at once to the defence of e7, while the

white king is much further away from his centre pawns and therefore less able to support them. Naturally if there were still queens on the board this would be of much less consequence, as a move like ♔f8 would risk coming under a mating attack.

26 ♘b3?

White is still eager to attack, apparently believing that he has the initiative. He should have settled for the quiet centralising move 26 ♔f1.
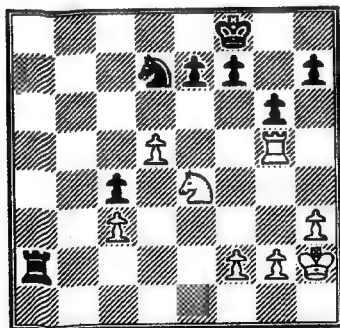
26...c4 27 ♘c5 ♖a1+ 28 ♔h2 ♘f6!

Stopping the threat of 29 ♘d7+. Now the c3 and d5 pawns are terribly weak and to add to White's problems he is in effect ▪ 'king down'.

29 ♘e4

White can only resort to tricks to hold onto his pawns – 29...♖e1!? 30 ♘xf6 with ▪ fork on d7 would do very nicely. But after Black's reply the white rook is ejected into outer darkness on g5.

29...♘d7 30 ♖g5 ♖a2!

Bronstein is remorseless in wearing down the white position. As well ▪▪ the pawns ▪n c3 and d5 he plans to target f2.
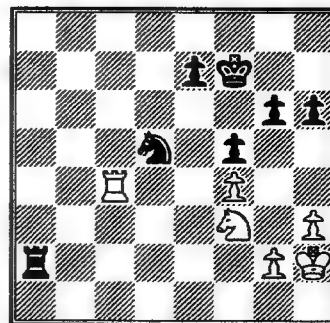
31 ♖g4 f5 32 ♖f4

The rook has made it back into the game but meanwhile Black's pressure has become intolerable.

32...♘b6 33 ♘g5 ♘xd5

Finally one of the scattered pawns drops and if 34 ♖xc4 ♖xf2. Bronstein duly wrapped things up:

34 ♖d4 ♘b6 35 ♖d8+ ♔g7 36 f4 h6 37 ♘e6+ ♔f7 38 ♘d4 ♘a4 39 ♖c8 ♘xc3 40 ♖xc4 ♘d5 41 ♘f3

41...♖xg2+ 42 ♔h1
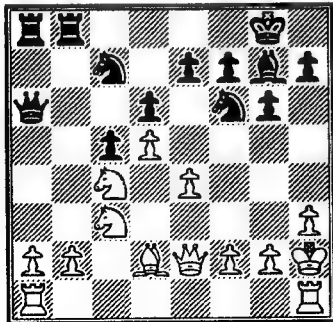
Of course if 42 ♔xg2 ♘e3+ wins.

42... ♖f2 0-1

Nevertheless, Bronstein is a somewhat flawed hero. Despite winning in the endgame, he was far too pessimistic about Black's chances in this phase of the game due to the missing pawn: 'should White gradually succeed in overcoming all his difficulties, and reach an endgame, he will have excellent winning chances'.

It was this view which had to be overturned if the Benko was ever to become popular. It was the task of a third hero, Pal Benko, to show that most Benko endgames are not just acceptable for Black, but even favourable.

H.Camara *White*
P.Benko *Black*
Sao Paulo 1973

Rather than fearing the endgame ■ pawn down, Benko positively invited it with
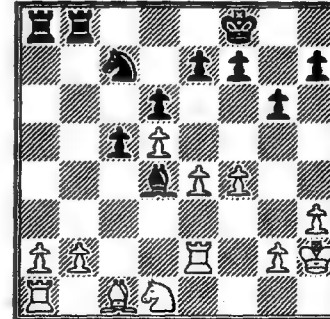
16...♘d7! 17 ♖he1 ♘e5 18 ♘xe5 ♗xe5+ 19 f4 ♗d4 20 ♗c1?

A miserable retreat that shows White has become obsessed with the extra pawn and forgotten all about the need for development or piece coordination. He had to go in for heavy defence with 20 ♕xa6 ♖xa6 21 b3 ♘b5 22 ♖ec1.

20...♕xe2 21 ♖xe2 ♔f8! 22 ♘d1?

And now the knight joins the bishop on the back rank. It can be said that the knight on c3 performs a vital role in the Benko, as it holds together the white centre and shields b2 from attack. Black often goes to ■ lot of trouble to remove it, so it should never be retreated in such ■ gratuitous manner. Evidently the

idea w■■ 23 ♘e3, but White has overlooked the deadly reply which has since become ■ common counter attacking theme in the Benko:

22...f5!

Black bashes up the white centre and wins the d5 pawn. Note that the shrewd 21...♔f8 defended the e7 pawn to make this possible. Here again we see that once queens are exchanged the black king being so close to e7 is a great help to Black. In contrast the e4 pawn cannot be defended by the white king.

The rest is like ■ film of a massacre, in slow motion at first and then gradually speeding up:

23 exf5 gxf5 24 ♗e3 ♘xd5 25 ♗xd4 cxd4 26 ♖d2 e5 27 fxe5 dxe5 28 ♘f2 ♔e7 29 a3 ♘e3

and the black pawns steamrollered forwards.

These were balmy days for the Benko – and for Mr Benko himself!

Pal Benko (1928-) not only proved the worth of the Benko in practical games but also campaigned for it in the form of
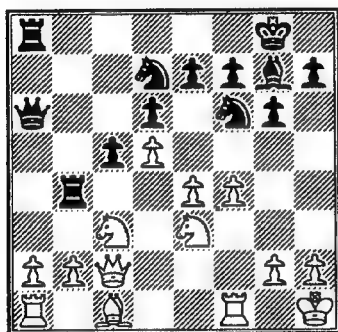
magazine articles and eventually a book, *The Benko Gambit*, published in 1973. The names of chess openings tend to be chosen almost at random, but Benko deserves to be remembered for his efforts. He also of course has the Benko Opening 1 g3 named after him – which he used to beat Fischer and Tal at Curacao back in 1962. No more need be said!

The next hero isn't a person but a place in Macedonia called Skopje. The Olympiad was held there in 1972 and the Benko enthusiasts were waiting with their knives sharpened. In 16 games with the gambit Black scored the amazing total of *10 wins and six draws*. This would be an outrageous result for an opening as White – but with Black it is almost unbelievable. Looking through the games, only once was Black clearly busted, and even then he managed to win with a swindle.

A.Berrios Pagan *White*
I.Onat *Black*
Skopje 1973

Here is one example of the Skopje massacre. It shows that White was oblivious to the danger along the a1-h8 diagonal as he played the natural developing move...
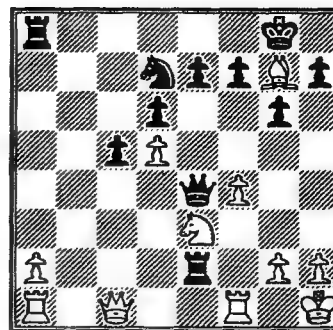
16 ♗d2?

He was knocked back by

16...♘xe4! 17 ♘xe4 ♖xb2 18 ♕c1

With his temporary piece sacrifice, Black has splintered the white centre and conquered the b2 square with his rook. Furthermore, the bishop on g7 has been unleashed and the rook on a1 is a target. Black exploited the lack of coordination in White with some strong tactical blows:

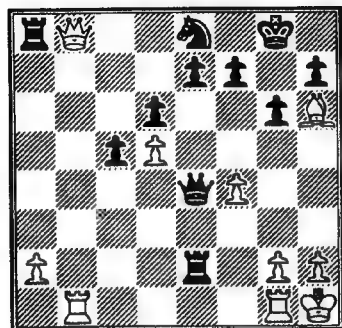**18...♕d3! 19 ♗c3 ♖e2 20 ♗xg7 ♕xe4**

Now White has to give back a piece, after which he is a pawn down and paralysed by threats to g2.

21 ♗h6 ♖xe3 22 ♕b2 ♘f6 23 ♖ab1

It looks like White might be getting some counterplay, but...

23...♖e2! 24 ♕b8+ ♘e8 25 ♖g1

A sad necessity as Black gets in his mate first if he takes the rook on a8. Now three more white pawns drop one after the after:

25...♕xd5! 26 ♕b5 ♖exa2
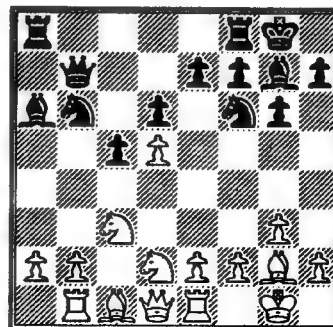
Don't get too excited: 26...♖axa2?? 27 ♕xe8 mate.

27 ♖ ♕xf5 28 ♖gf1 ♕h5 29 ♕c4 ♘f6 30 ♕c1 ♘g4 31 ♗f4 ♘f2+ 32 ♖xf2 ♖xf2 33 ♗g3 ♖fa2 and White had had enough.

The Benko had arrived with a bang. It must have appeared in 1973 that a brave new world had began with the peerless fighter Bobby Fischer as World Champion and the Benko at the forefront of a new dynamic chess style. Alas, in reality it was a post-Fischer age and the Benko would never have such a brilliant result again. While Fischer's retirement was a tragedy for all chess lovers, it is no bad thing that the Benko doesn't actually refute 1 d4.

The next hero is Lev Alburt. He was born in Odessa in 1945, emigrated to the USA in 1979 and played top board at the Olympiad of 1980. He has been very faithful to his chosen openings, playing the Alekhine versus 1 e4 and the Benko versus 1 d4 through fair weather and foul. Here is one of his brightest ever episodes. Indeed I believe it is the greatest game ever played in the Benko. It illustrates perfectly the dynamism that the black pieces can achieve when the queenside landscape is stripped of pawns.

V.Hort *White*
L.Alburt *Black*
Decin 1977

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g4 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 ♘f3 d6 8 g3 ♗g7 9 ♗g2 ♘bd7 10 0-0 ♘b6 11 ♖e1 0-0 12 ♘d2 ♕c7 13 ♖b1 ♕b7!?

A courageous move. It isn't often that Black plans to snatch the d5 pawn from under the nose of the bishop on g2.
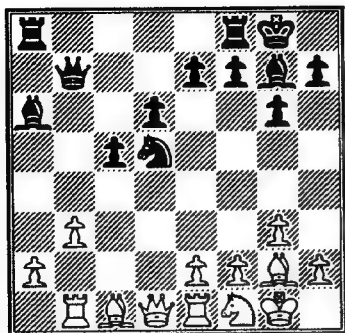
14 b3

Hort can't quite believe that Alburt really intends to take on d5 as it would leave the black queen and the rook on a8 very awkwardly placed. However, as Steinitz once remarked 'a centre pawn ahead is worth a little trouble.'

14...♘fxd5!

A very useful pawn to grab, but what about the pin on the black queen? Well, there isn't going to be any pin!

15 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 16 ♘f1

No doubt expecting 16...e6 when 17 ♘e3 ♘xe3 18 ♗xe3 d5 19 ♗xc5 would be very nice for White, but there is another surprise awaiting Hort.

16...♘c3!!

An excellent positional sacrifice of the queen.

17 ♗xb7 ♗xb7!

And not the feeble 17...♘xd1 when 18 ♗xa8 ♘c3 19 ♗e4 ♘xe4 20 ♗b2 would be a 'clean' way for White to be the exchange up in the endgame.

18 ♕d3

No matter how White plays the knight fork will ensure that Black picks up a rook as well as a bishop for the queen.

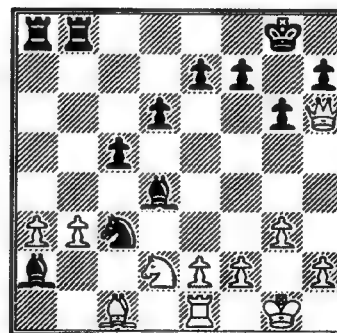**18...♗e4 19 ♕e3 ♗d4 20 ♕h6 ♗xb1 21 a3 ♗a2**

In return for the queen, Black has a rook and a bishop. This isn't quite enough materially speaking, but he has enormous positional plusses: an active knight and strong bishop pair, and targets for his rooks on a3 and b3. It is also very important than he has a very solid pawn chain to keep out the white queen.

There is only one word of warning necessary, which applies in many Benko situations. It is all very well for Black to chop up

the white queenside, but he must remember that committing so many pieces to the far side of the board leaves his king vulnerable to a sudden attack. Here for example if the white knight were on f3 rather than f1, Black would have to resign immediately after 1 ♘g5. Of course this is no more than a fairy tale, but should Black play with insufficient energy then White can build up an attack with ♘d2, ♘f3, ♕h4, ♗h6 and ♘g5.

However, there isn't going to be any passive defence from Black. Alburt has correctly judged the time factor and concluded that White will be unable to bring enough force to bear on his kingside before he has broken through on the queenside. This means that White's pieces will be tied down to defensive duty and therefore unable to coordinate their action in an attack.

22 ♘d2 ♖fb8

The black pieces are now all beautifully coordinated whereas the white pieces, apart from the queen, are all tied to the defence of pawns: the rook must defend e2, the bishop a3 and the knight b3.

23 b4

As both the a and b pawn are ultimately doomed, Hort decides to make the best deal possible by exchanging them for the c5

pawn. Strategically speaking this is ∎ good idea as it prevents Black acquiring a passed pawn on c5, but unfortunately the pressure from the black pieces will be quite suffocating.

23...cxb4 24 axb4 ♖xb4 25 ♘f3 ♗g7 26 ♕h3 ♗e6!

Now the poor white queen is driven all the way back to f1.

27 ♕f1 ♗c4 28 ♔g2

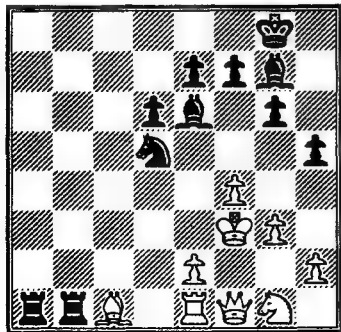The white king moves out of the way to allow the knight to retreat to g1 to help defend e2.

28...♖a1 29 ♘g1 ♖bb1

The black rooks have migrated across the board from a8 and b8 ∎ a1 and b1.

30 ♔h3

A quite ridiculous position in which the white king is the only piece that can be moved without dropping material.

30...h5 31 ♙4 ♗e6+ 32 ♔g2 ♘d5 33 ♔f3

No, there is nothing wrong with the diagram. There really is ∎ white king on f3 and the knight on g1 and not vice versa. Alburt ∎ last decides to put his opponent out of his misery.
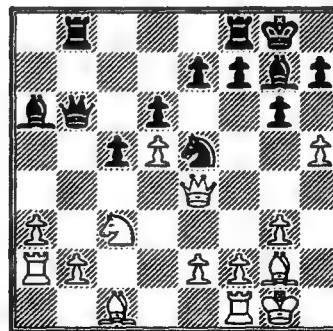
33...♗c3 34 ♖d1 ♗b2 0-1

It is no wonder that players sat up and took notice of the Benko after crushing wins of this type.

Finally, the US Grandmaster John Fedorowicz deserves a special mention not just for his dynamic play as Black but also because he wrote ∎ great book on the opening back in 1990 called *The Complete Benko Gambit*.

J.Ehlvest *White*
J.Fedorowicz *Black*
New York 1989

19...♕b3!

Black is angling for a queen exchange. In spite of the extra pawn these endgames are often unpleasant for White. Thinking in terms of defence, Fedorowicz wants to kill off any chance White has of launching a mating attack against the black king so that he can concentrate on his queenside action; more aggressively

speaking, he desires to be rid of the white queen as she is playing a pivotal role in holding together the white queenside.

Incidentally, this extract also shows why White should never be in a hurry to nudge the pawn to a3 – the b3 square is likely to become a focal point for Black's attack.
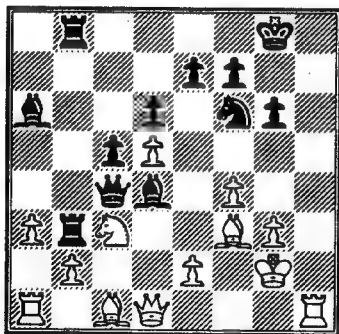
20 ♖a1 ♛c4!

White dreams of a kingside attack not an endgame in which he is permanently tied down to the weak pawn on b2. Therefore he retreats his queen but that leaves the enemy queen unchallenged on c4.

21 ♛c2 ♖b3 22 hxg6 hxg6 23 f4

Ehlvest feels obliged to dislodge the black knight as the first step in clearing the way for a kingside attack. Of course this is very loosening, but he couldn't just wait as Black builds up with ♖fb8 etc.

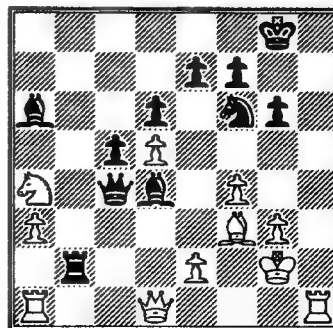## 23...♞g4 24 ♗f3 ♗d4+ 25 ♔g2 ♞f6 26 ♛d1 ♖fb8 27 ♖h1

White only has time for one attacking gesture on the kingside before the roof caves in on the queenside.

27...♖xb2!

The patent Benko breakthrough.

28 ♗xb2 ♖xb2 29 ♞a4

A more spectacular way to lose was 29 ♞e4 ♞xe4 30 ♗xe4 ♖xe2+ 31 ♔f3 ♛c3+ 32 ♔g4 ♗c8+ 33 ♔g5 ♛xg3+ 34 ♔h6 ♗g7 when the black bishop gets to mate the white king on its favourite square.

29...♖b3!

As well as grand attacking gestures, Black does well to simply remove his opponent's pieces from the board. Now the white knight drops off and after some neat defensive moves the passed c pawn will win the day. The rest is all skin and bones.

30 ♖b1 ♖xb1 31 ♛xb1 ♛xa4 32 f5 g5 33 ♛c1 ♞h7 34 ♛b1 ♗f6 35 ♛b8+ ♞f8 36 g4 c4 37 ♖b1 c3 38 ♛d8 ♛c2 0-1

At the time of writing the two greatest Benko devotees amongst the world elite are Alexander Khalifman of Russia and Veselin Topalov of Bulgaria. Some years ago Michael Adams and the young Peter Leko were keen Benkoists and their games are well worth studying.

You might be wondering by now, 'Okay, we've met the heroes, but where are the zeros?' Well, as a matter of fact you *have* already met them. The point is you can't be a hero in the Benko Gambit unless you are also prepared to be a zero. This might sound paradoxical, but the occasional quick disaster is the sign of a strongly creative player. If you are continually trying out new ideas or exploring unfamiliar territory then it is inevitable that you are going to fall into a hole sooner or later. But overall the rewards of enterprising play are enormous and far outshine those of plodding, dull play. The only 'real' zero is a player who loses heart after a bad reverse: the heroes of the Benko have suffered some horrifying defeats, but have always bounced back to score beautiful wins.

Strategy in the Benko

What keeps chess alive and fresh after centuries of analysis is that it is resistant to all attempts to find a formula to play it perfectly. In fact, it refuses even to be bound by hard and fast strategical laws – there are endless exceptions and paradoxes in chess. Thus any idea can be good or bad according to the circumstances of a specific game.

That is why we need to calculate variations to support our ideas and also appraise the strategical features of the unique position in front of us. It isn't enough to know what happened in similar positions in earlier games.

Having said that, it is essential to know the plans and schemes that have been adopted by strong players in identical or similar positions in the past – this knowledge points us to the ideas that have the *capacity* to be good. Without this prior information, we would be as helpless as Nimzowitsch when he was the first player to face the Benko set up back in 1914.
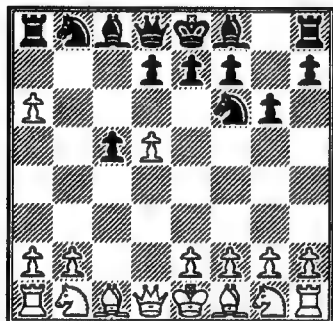
In this chapter we look at ideas for White and Black which have the capacity to be good. Keep them at the back of your mind and bring them out to examine when you plan your strategy – but be highly critical and remember that they might be downright blunders. Things never work in real games as well as they do in books!

The Benko Mainline – basic strategical ideas

Earlier in the book we discussed the starting moves of a typical Benko game – you may wish to refresh your memory by rereading pages 7 to 17.

Here we shall renew the discussion on strategy by examining these moves in greater detail.

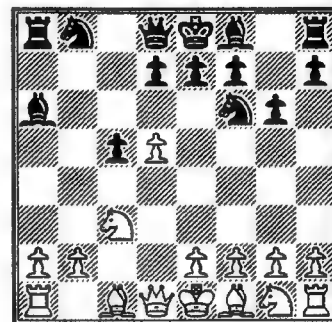**1 d4 ♘f6 ⃞ c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6!**

A finesse in move order

White would very much like to put his bishop on b2 where it can oppose the black bishop on g7. He achieves this aim after 5...♗xa6?! 6 g3 d6 7 ♗g2 g6 8 b3! ♗g7 ♕ ♗b2 0-0 10 ♘h3 ♘bd7 11 0-0 when it is very hard for Black to generate counterplay as his pressure along the a1-h8 diagonal has been more or less neutralised.

By delaying the capture on a6 Black gives himself the opportunity to oppose this plan with ♘xa6! and then ♗b7, when severe pressure can be exerted on the white centre with ♘b4 and e7-e6. Let's see what might happen if White nonetheless sticks to the plan of b2-b3 and ♗b2:

5...g6! 6 b3 ♗g7 7 ♗b2 0-0 8 g3 ♘xa6! 9 ♗g2 d6 10 e4 ♗b7 11 ♘e2 e6! Whilst White has been arranging ♗b2 Black has methodically built up pressure on d5. Now White will be left with a weak, ultimately indefensible pawn on d5 unless he plays 12 dxe6 but then 12...fxe6 13 ♘bc3 ♘xe4 gets the pawn back with advantage whilst 13 ♘d2 ♘b4 intending 14...♘d3 would be very active for Black.

6 ♘c3 ♗xa6

What has Black gained for his pawn?

A great rook on a8

In virtually every opening the rook on a8 has to wait ◼ long, long time before it plays any active role in the game; this isn't surprising as its route along the first rank to the centre is obstructed by ◼ knight, bishop and queen, and even if it reaches c8 or d8 it might still be hemmed in by ◼ pawn. If Black suffers ◼ quick defeat – or victory! – without completing his development, it is usually the poor rook on a8 that misses out on the show.

In contrast, in the Benko the rook on a8 has in effect been developed without even moving: an open file has been presented to it free of charge, with no dubious small print and no strings attached.

A great bishop on a6

Black's light squared bishop is often maligned in queen pawn openings – indeed Tarrasch referred to it as his 'problem child'. His grudge was based mainly on the fact that it is shut in and passive after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6. but even in modern openings such as the King's Indian Defence it can be hard find a suitable way to develop the bishop on c8. The most notorious example is in the Samisch King's Indian: 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 0-0 5 f3 d6 6 ♗e3. Just how is the bishop on c8 going to find an active role?

In the Benko the bishop is presented with the a6 square and can also use the b7 square as appropriate. In either case it has avoided the clutter along the c8-h3 diagonal so typical of King's Indian set ups and has escaped outside the black pawn structure. It becomes a useful and active piece that can only be exchanged at great inconvenience for White.

The pawn on d5

Black has removed the pillar on c4 which supported the white spearhead on d5. The white pawn on d5, although immensely useful in controlling centre squares – most notably in keeping the black knight out of c6 – has rushed a long way in front of the other white pieces. Having lost its companion on c4 it is therefore somewhat isolated and the task of supporting it with e2-e4 can prove to be hazardous for the rest of its army. Thus if White plays the direct 7 e4 then the king will have to forfeit castling kingside after 7...♗xf1.

In fact once White has played 4 cxb5 there is no way of reinforcing the pawn with e2-e4 which doesn't involve a positional concession, either in misplacing a piece, wasting time or returning the extra pawn. This is as true in sidelines such as 4 e3 as it is in the mainline. Furthermore, in many lines the pawn on d5 can be directly challenged with e7-e6 when in extreme cases White gets violently overrun in the centre. More likely White would have to concede that Black had achieved an easy development and secured sufficient counterplay.

White castles by hand

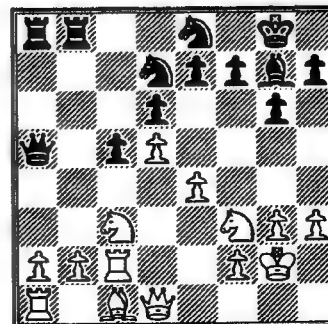Let's jump ahead some more moves so that we can see the play unfold. From the diagram above:

7 e4

White plays his most natural move, even though it involves the serious concession of giving up castling.

7...♗xf1 8 ♔xf1 d6 9 ♘f3 ♗g7 10 g3

White intends to castle by hand – that is play ♔g2 and then bring the rook from h1 into the centre. In this way he hopes to safeguard his king and complete his development.

10...♘bd7 11 ♔g2 0-0 12 ♖e1 ♕a5 13 h3 ♖fb8 14 ♖e2 ♘e8 15 ♖c2

Black's dynamic piece deployment

The diagram on the presvious page shows you the sort of set up Black is aiming for. He has both rooks on open lines where they are bearing down on the white queenside pawns. In contrast the white rooks have no scope and are only being used to defend pawns. Black's bishop enjoys an open diagonal and is exerting pressure on both the white knight and beyond it the pawn on b2 – and even the rook on a1 might prove a target in the future. With ♞f6-e8! Black has restrained White from breaking up the centre with e4-e5, at least for the forseeable future, as he now has three units guarding e5.
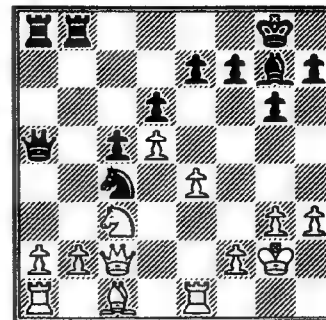
Black's middlegame strategy

How should Black proceed from the diagram above?

With all his heavy pieces on the queenside, the obvious plan is to try to increase the pressure on a2, b3 and c3. This can be done with the knight manoeuvre ♞e8-c7-b5, challenging the white knight on c3. Black is very happy to exchange off White's knight that blocks the way to b2. An alternative is to use the other knight on d7 to accost the white knight, this time with ♞b6 and then ♞a4, which has the added effect of attacking b2; or Black might focus exclusively on the b2 point with ♞b6 and ♞c4.

Black would of course be delighted to eliminate the pawn on a2, but the real prize is the b2 pawn: if that falls then the white queenside crumbles and the bishop on g7 becomes a monster. At best White would have a rotten pawn structure in the endgame, as the protected passed pawn on c5 far outweighs an isolated pawn on a2; at worst he wouldn't even survive until the endgame as the pressure would be too great. There are countless examples in the Benko of Black playing ♖xb2! as a pseudo or sometimes genuine exchange sacrifice to break up the white defences.
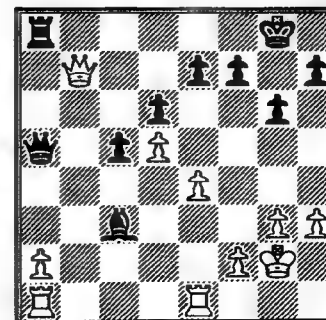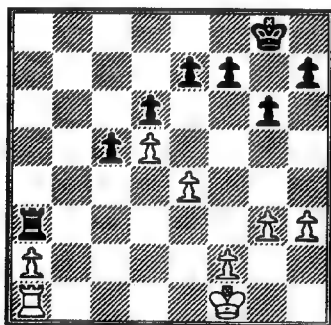
Black's sacrifice on b2

In fact in the Benko Mainline the chance to sacrifice on b2 is more than a mere opportunistic tactic: it is a fundamental facet of Black's strategy.

In the diagram above White has played too passively and allowed Black to carry out his plan. Now after 1...♞xb2! 2 ♗xb2 ♖xb2 3 ♕xb2 ♗xc3 all White's pieces apart from the king are hanging to the black bishop. If 4 ♕b1 ♗xe1 5 ♕xe1 ♕xe1 6 ♖xe1 ♖xa2 leaves Black a pawn up for nothing, so White tries 4 ♕b7.

A winning endgame for Black

Here it would be careless to play 4...♗xe1 5 ♖xe1, as taking on e1 drops the rook on a8 when we have a queen and pawn endgame. In this specific case it would in fact be very uncomfortable for White, but as a rule in the Benko Black wants a rook and pawn endgame. In a rook and pawn endgame there is enough firepower to attack White's loose pawns and also the chance to use the king actively. So Black should play the simple 4...♕a7! offering the exchange of queens rather than rushing to capture on either e1. At the same time the pawn on e7 is defended, so White has no choice but to agree to the swap or else he will lose the a2 pawn for nothing. After 5 ♕xa7 ♖xa7 6 ♖ec1 ♗xa1 7 ♖xa1 ♖a3! the white rook is well and truly tied down to the a2 pawn. White can only wait, for example 8 ♔f1.
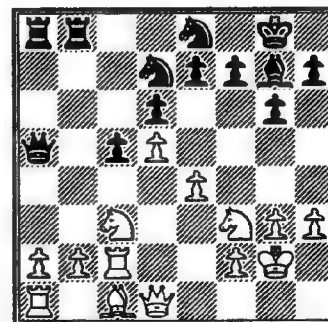

Now one thing Black mustn't do is start advancing his passed pawn – the fact that it is defended on c5 is a huge asset and it should stay there until all other preparations are complete. Instead Black could set off with his king on a long journey to the queenside, but moving him so far away from the kingside gives White the chance to jettison the a2 pawn at an appropriate moment and counterattack with the rook on the kingside. Besides, White could always play his own king over to b2.

The power of the f7-f5 attack

There is a far stronger plan for Black: 8...f5! This not only undermines the e4 pawn but clears the way for the white king to attack the white centre. Now 9 exf5 gxf5 10 ♔e2 (or 10 ♖e1 ♔f7! 11 ♖e1 ♖d3 12 a4 and here 12...♖xd5 will win, but 12...♖a3! is the most efficient) 10...♔f7 11 h4 – what else? – and Black has two ways to win – 11...♔f6 intending 12...♔e5 is by far the quickest and simplest, but the idea of 11...e6 should also be noted – Black disposes of the d5 pawn and creates connected passed pawns. Back at move eight standing firm in the centre wouldn't help White, e.g. if 8 f3 – instead of 8 ♔f1 – 8...f5! 9 ♔f2 ♔f7 and the black king will go to e5 with lethal effect.
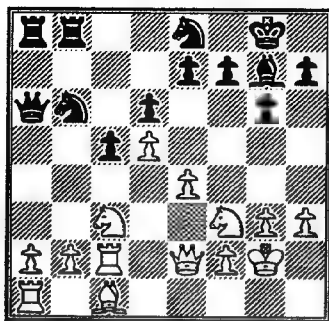
The exchange of queens

We shall once again refer to our thematic game. The position after 15 ♖c2 was reached in the game A.Beliavsky – A.Khalifman, Linares 1995, which continued

15...♘b6 16 ♕e2 ♕a6!

It is hard to think of any other gambit opening in which a player gives up a pawn and is then keen to exchange queens and reach

an endgame. The only example that springs to mind is the Marshall Counter Attack in the Ruy Lopez – but in that case Black normally tries for a direct attack on White's king, and only opts for an endgame that is incredibly hard for White to win if his attack is stymied. In contrast, in the Benko Mainline Black is looking for a queen exchange almost from the start – and not just to secure equal chances, but to play for a win.

However, although Black is pleased to exchange queens there are some pieces he would be loathe to exchange. Basically he wants to keep the strong bishop on g7 to terrorise b2 and the two rooks in order to apply pressure down the two half open files. It shouldn't be forgotten that in almost any endgame he needs to have at least one rook in order to maintain the initiative. In short, Black wants to exchange queens and knights and keep the other pieces in order to attack b2.

17 ♘g1?

The idea behind this move is to bolster the knight on c3, but it leads to the undesirable exchange of both knights. Instead after Khalifman's suggestion in *Informator 63* of 17 ♕xa6 ♖xa6 18 ♘d2 f5! 19 ♔ ♘a4 Black has plenty of initiative for the pawn but White still has the knight on d2 to play with – and perhaps should keep the other knight as well with 20 ♘d1!?.
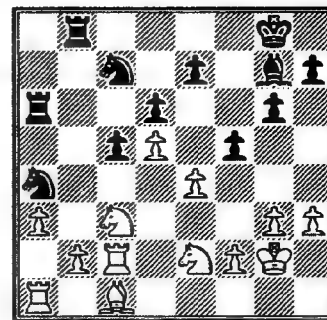
17...♘a4! 18 ♕xa6

Of course White's last move would be pointless if he doesn't exchange queens to clear the e2 square for the knight.
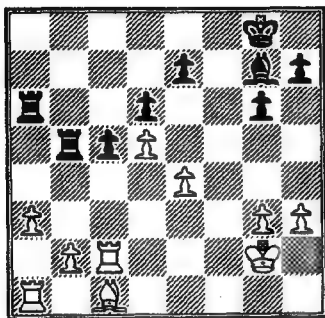
18...♖xa6 19 ♘ge2 ♘c7!

The other black knight heads for b5 to arrange a double exchange on c3. White is going to be stripped of every piece that can't be tied down to the defence of b2.
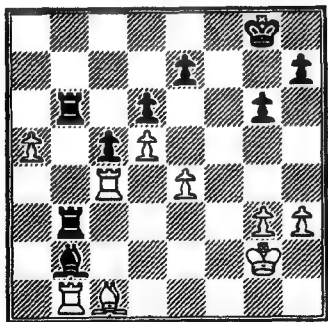
20 a3 f5!

Again this pawn break proves a vital facet of Black's strategy. White must now accept a weak backward pawn on e4 as after 21 exf5 gxf5 the d5 pawn will soon become indefensible. Since the queens have been exchanged it is easy for the black king to defend the e7 pawn with ♔f7. On the other hand, the white king can hardly help the pawn on e4 which now becomes the base of White's pawn chain in the centre. Does this all sound familiar? Check out the David Bronstein and Pal Benko games in the heroes section and you will soon see why.

21 f3 fxe4 22 fxe4 ♘xc3 23 ♘xc3 ♘b5 24 ♘xb5 ♖xb5

The multiple exchanges have left Black with exactly the material balance he wanted: two rooks and a bishop each. Now according to Khalifman 25 ♖a2 ♖b3 26 ♖e2 ♖a4 27 ♗f4 would be equal – and who am I to argue with the Benko maestro and former FIDE World Champion? Nevertheless, it is no surprise that Beliavsky rejected this path as there are few players who have nerves strong enough to endure the torments of abject passivity. In the game he tried to activate his pieces but it led to a queenside collapse.
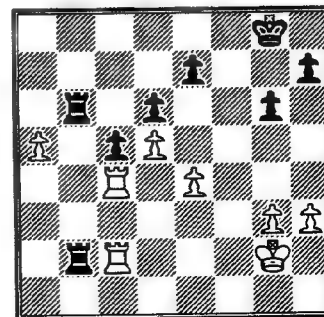
25 ♖c4? ♗xb2 26 ♖b1 ♖ab6 27 a4 ♖b3 28 a5

In the Benko White's passed a-pawn should never be underestimated – it may seem like a victim on a2 but like all

passed pawns it tends to gain momentum as it rolls up the board. Many a player has become obsessed as Black with nabbing a pawn on e4 or b2 and then found to his surprise that he can't get his rook back in time to stop the 'harmless' a-pawn from queening.

However in this instance Khalifman has everything under control and can pick off the a-pawn:

28...♗xc1! 29 ♖bxc1 ♖b2+ 30 ♖1c2

30...♖6b5!

An instructive sequence of moves. If 30...♖xc2+? 31 ♖xc2 ♖a6 32 ♖a2 defends the pawn safely, so Black plans to force the pawn to a7 when ♖a6 will get the black rook behind the passed pawn and at the same time prevent ♖a2.
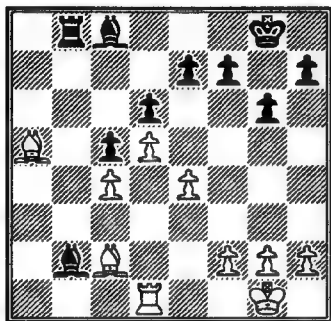
31 a6 ♖b6 32 e5

If 32 a7 ♖xc2+ 33 ♖xc2 ♖a6 wins the pawn.

32...♖xc2+ 33 ♖xc2 ♖xa6 34 exd6 exd6 35 ♖e2 ♔f7 36 ♖e6 c4! and Black eventually ground out the win in another eighteen moves.

Here is another example of Black exploiting his superior pawn structure in a Benko endgame.

V.Epishin *White*
K.Georgiev *Black*
Germany 1997

It is Black's move. You might not think there's much going on here and that the draw is inevitable. But in fact after
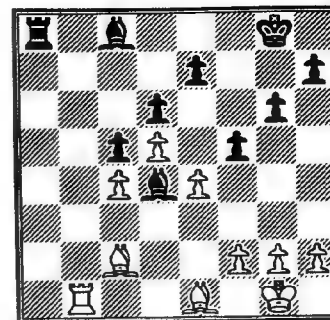
28...♗d4!

Black has every chance to win due to the weaknesses on c4 and f2. Already there is the threat of 29...♖b2.

29 ♖b1 ♖a8!

Under no circumstances should Black agree to an exchange of rooks with 29...♖xb1+? 30 ♗xb1. In almost any Benko endgame he needs the help of a rook to attack the enemy pawns.

30 ♗e1 f5!

A vital strengthening of the attack. Black not only clears the way for his king to enter the game but also puts pressure on e4. This can only be relieved by agreeing to exchange light squared bishops but after 31 exf5 ♗xf5 32 ♗xf5 gxf5 33 ♔f1 ♖a1 34 ♖c1 ♖a2 White can't move either his rook or bishop without losing a pawn. He would therefore be reduced to moving his king and waiting for Black to find a winning plan – for example putting the king on f7 and then playing e7-e6. If White responds d5xe6+ he can create a passed pawn on the c file with ♔xe6 and then d6-d5.

31 g3 ♖a2 32 ♗b3 ♖a3 33 ♗c2 ♔f7 34 ♔g2 ♗c3!

The black rook bludgeons its way through to c3 after which the c4 pawn becomes indefensible.

35 h4

If 35 exf5 ♗xf5 36 ♗xf5 gxf5 and the c4 pawn will be lost to ♖c3 no matter how White plays.

35...♗xe1 36 ♖xe1 ♖c3 37 ♗b1 ♖xc4 38 h5 fxe4 39 ♗xe4 ♗b7

With the threat of 40...♖xe4!

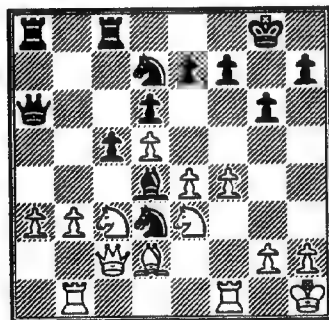**40 f3 ♖d4 41 hxg6+ hxg6 42 ♔f2 ♗xd5 0-1**

Black plays c5-c4

This is one of Black's three main pawn breaks – the others are e7-e6 and f7-f5. It is a double edged idea as, positionally speaking, it gives away the d4 square and removes the strong pawn from c5 – the best feature of Black's pawn structure. On the other hand, under the right circumstances it can be a devastating blow that rips open both files and diagonals for the black pieces.

E.Bareev White
G.Kasparov Black
Linares 1994

Here the conditions are excellent for the pawn advance as Black already has his knight on a strong attacking square:
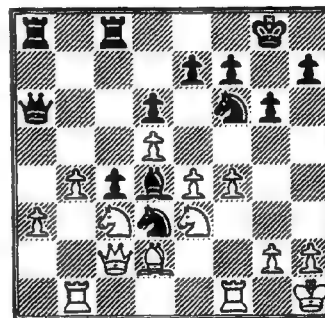
19...c4! 20 b4

If 20 ♘xc4 ♘f2+ 21 ♖xf2 ♗xf2 22 a4 ♖xc4! – giving back the exchange before White can consolidate his passed pawns with 23 ♘a3 – 23 bxc4 ♕xc4 with a slight edge for Black according to Kasparov in *Informator 60*.

20...♘f6 21 ♘ed1

White bolsters the knight on c3 as 21...♗xc3 followed by 22...♘xe4 was on the cards. The advance of the c-pawn has cleared the way to apply further pressure on the weak f2 square with 21...♕b6. Alternatively, Black could prepare to break up the white centre with 21...♗b7 intending 22...e6 as suggested by Kasparov. In the game there followed

21...♖cb8?! 22 ♘e3 ♖c8!

The World Champion admits his last move was a mistake – a lesson in humility for us all.

23 b5?

Still, Black's imprecision has a surprising effect, as Bareev decides to become active. The result is that his carefully constructed fortress on the queenside collapses. After 23 ♘ed1! I'm sure Kasparov would have played one of his suggestions above rather than acquiesce to a draw.

23...♕b6 24 ♘xc4 ♘f2+! 25 ♖xf2 ♖xc4 26 ♖f3

Hereafter Black won in an error strewn melee that suggested severe time pressure. Instead Kasparov gives the variation 26...♗xc3! 27 ♗xc3 ♘xe4 28 ♖b3 ♖ac8 29 h3 ♕c5 putting

White under intense pressure along the c file. That can only be bought off by 30 b6 when 30...♛xd5 31 b7 ♖b♛ is clearly better for Black.
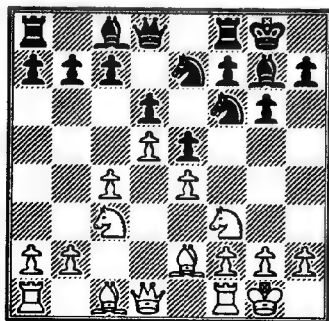
The crucial lesson is that Kasparov only played 19...c4 because he had specific tactical ideas in mind – namely threats against e4 and f2. He wouldn't have just played it on whim because it 'looked right'.

Incidentally, Gary Kasparov has rarely adopted the Benko Gambit as Black, though he has shown a fondness for playing b7-b5 as a pawn sacrifice to open lines in various King's Indian games. A much greater devotee of the Benko is his namesake *Sergei* Kasparov.

What Black is not trying to do

It can actually be harmful to transfer ideas from the King's Indian to the Benko. The philosophy is usually very different. Take the middlegame position reached after

1 d4 ♞f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♞c3 ♝g7 ♙ e4 0-0 5 ♞f3 d6 6 ♝e2 e5 7 0-0 ♞c6 8 d5 ♞e7

As in the Benko, Black has fianchettoed on g7; but here the similarity ends. Black has shut in his bishop with 6...e5 – the idea
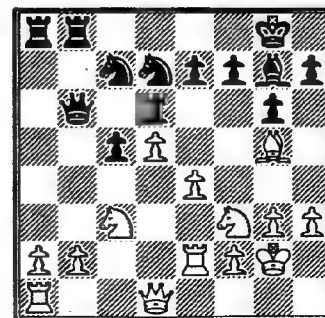
is to bolster his pawn presence in the centre in order to prepare an eventual f7-f5 to undermine e4 and start a kingside attack. The emphasis is on positional jockeying: roughly speaking White presses forwards on the queenside, whilst Black tries to get his clump of pawns rolling on the kingside. This often leads to tactical fireworks, but they are usually preceded by a manoeuvring phase in a semi-blocked position.

In the Benko, e7-e5 is almost never part of Black's strategy: on the contrary, he wants to keep the diagonal of his bishop open, as he is looking for counterplay on the queenside, NOT on the kingside. If he does strike a blow against the white king, it will come via the queenside or as a consequence of successfully undermining White's centre, for example with the f7-f5 stroke.

White plays ♝g5: a noteworthy trap

The dark squared bishop is often White's problem piece in the Benko Mainline as it isn't easy to find a role for it. He sometimes puts it on g5 but this is something of a half hearted gesture, designed to provoke a weakening of the black kingside with h7-h6 before retreating the bishop again. An important tactical device often available to Black is that he can meet a threat to e7 as follows:

Black can force the bishop to declare its intentions with 1...h6! when if 2 ♗xe7? ♖e8 3 ♗h4 g5 traps it. After 4 ♗xg5 hxg5 5 ♘xg5 ♘f6 White has neither serious attacking chances on the kingside nor strong passed pawns, so the extra black piece significantly outweighs the pawns.

We can see from this how clever it was for Black to play 5...g6! in the opening rather than 5...♗xa6 in order to prevent the white bishop getting to b2, when White has killed two birds with one stone: he has found a useful square for his bishop *and* he has lessened the power of Black's bishop on g7. If White could get his bishop to b2 at a later point he would be delighted, but this is fraught with danger once Black is putting pressure along the a1-h8 diagonal with his bishop.

Winning strategies for White

It is rarely a good idea for White to base his strategy on the advance of the queenside pawns towards the eighth rank. In fact, this is exactly the naive response that Black is hoping for when he plays the Benko Gambit. It is most likely to end in total disaster for White as the fire from the black pieces is ferocious. Such a strategy could be compared to the Charge of the Light Brigade, with the black rooks on a8 and b8 being the Russian cannon.
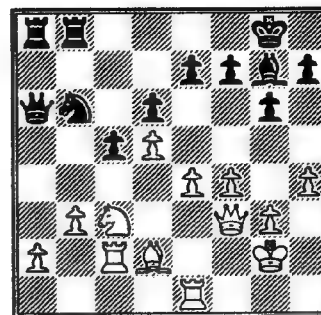
As an initial measure, a far better aim for White is to establish a firm defensive wall on the queenside which deprives the black pieces of any counterplay there. This may involve advancing the white pawns to a4 and b3, but no further. Once Black has run out of ideas then White can prepare a breakthrough in the centre based on e4-e5.
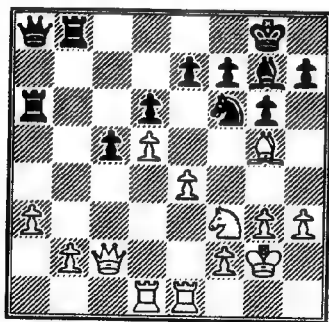
Let's see how this might work in practice.

J.Hjartarson *White*
B.Zueger *Black*
Winterthur 1996

Black was eager to attack but after **21...c4?** we have an instance of the c5-c4 break failing, as White was able to bypass the pawn with **22 b4!** After **22...♛c8 23 ♗c1! ♘d7 24 a3** White had consolidated his queenside pawns leaving Black absolutely no counterplay on the queenside. The pawn on c4 is just dead wood. Note that if White's pawn was on f2, rather than f4, Black would be able to activate his knight with 1...♘e5 and 2...♘d3. But in the actual position White has both c5 and e5 covered which prevents the black knight doing anything. In the game White quickly broke through in the centre after **24...♘f6 25 ♗b2 e6 26 dxe6 ♛xe6 27 ♖ce2 ♛d7 28 e5 dxe5 29 fxe5 ♘e8 30 e6 fxe6 31 ♖xe6 ♖a7 32 ♘d5** etc. and won quickly. It will be seen that White didn't try to advance his queenside pawns quickly: their best role was as a long-term threat, preventing any counterplay. That enabled White to carry out his plan of attack in the centre without distraction.

G.Van Laatum White
L.Trent Black
Hastings 1999

19 Bc1

White hits on the idea of putting his bishop on b2, when it will restrain Black's bishop and also be well positioned to support an e4-e5 advance in the centre.

19...Wb7 20 Nd2!

An excellent positional move which prevents his opponent from offering the exchange of queens with 20...Wb3.

20...Nd7 21 b3 Wb5 22 Bb2 Ne5?

Black misses his chance. After 22...Bxb2 23 Wxb2 c4! exploiting the pin on the b file and planning Ne5 etc. he would have an active game.
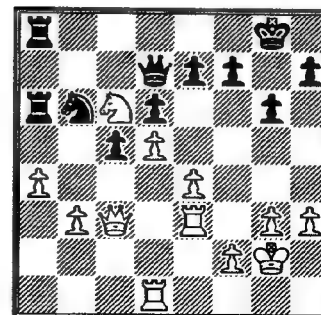
23 Re3

Now Black runs out of constructive ideas.

23...Nd7 24 Bxg7 Kxg7 25 Nc4 Nb6 26 Wc3+ Kg8 27 a4!

You will recall that the exchange of knights favours Black in the Benko. True enough 27 Nxb6 Raxb6 would give Black plenty of play, while at the same time diminishing the chance of a successful assault on the black king. But White has found a way not only to avoid the exchange but also to put his knight on a monster square.

27...Wd7 28 Na5 Rba8 29 Nc6

White's ideas now include 30 a5 Nc8 31 e5 powering through the centre, but not immediately 30 e5?? because of 30...Nxd5! 31 Rxd5 Wxc6 turning the tables as the threat of 32...e6 wins for Black. In fact White would probably aim to improve his position further before playing the committal a4-a5 and e4-e5, for example with 30 Kh2, putting the king on a safer square.

29...e6?

One of the good things about the Benko for Black is that no matter how awful his position may look, it is often a tough nut to crack. After 29...f6, preventing any immediate e4-e5, White would still have to work hard for the point.

30 Wb6 Nc8 31 h4 h5 32 Rf3 We8 33 Nd8 exd5 34 Nxf7 1-0

The threat is mate on h8.
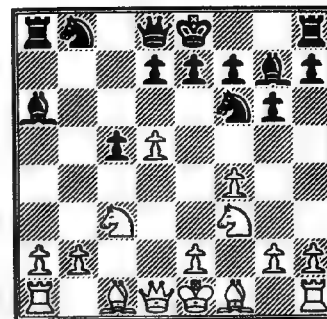
White's e4-e5 advance

In the two examples above we see the one drawback to the otherwise excellent Benko Gambit. By avoiding establishing a pawn centre in King's Indian style with e7-e5, Black is leaving himself open to a white thrust with e4-e5.

This pawn advance can be an overwhelming blow that establishes a stranglehold on the centre; or it can be a fatally loosening move that overstretches the white pawn structure. It all depends on the specific position. However, one thing however is obvious: if White achieves e4-e5 in favourable circumstances then he is almost certainly going to have a good position. It could be the prelude to a kingside attack; or perhaps the aim would be to split up the immaculate black pawn structure with e4xd6, when after the recapture e7xd6 the d6 pawn is a target. Furthermore, in that case the opening of the e file should favour White – after all, Black already has the semi open a and b files for his rooks, so he doesn't need or want a third open file on the board – whereas the white rooks are hungry for an open file.

Black must therefore avoid becoming so engrossed in his queenside strategy that he lets White play the centre advance in a favourable way; or, if the advance cannot be prevented, it should meet with appropriate resistance.

The merit or otherwise of e4-e5 is a recurring theme throughout this book. Black must be particularly careful in his response to a bid to overrun him right in the opening, for example

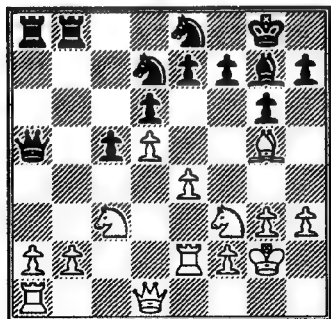1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 f4 ♗g7 8 ♘f3

White prepares centre action in unashamedly crude style. Like a modern day Philidor he left his knight on g1 for a move to keep the way open for his f pawn and now is ready to power forwards with e4-e5. After 8...0-0?! he gets to carry out his plan 9 e4 ♗xf1 10 ♖xf1 d6 11 e5! dxe5 12 fxe5 ♘g4 13 ♕e2 intending 14 ♗f4 with a massive bind on the centre. Rather than automatically castling, Black should have looked for counterplay with the active 8...♕a5! when 9 ♗d2 [not 9 e4 ♘xe4] 9...0-0 10 e4 d6! refuses to play ball with 10...♗xf1 11 ♖xf1, bringing the white rook into the attack. Then 11 ♗xa6 ♕xa6 will oblige White to offer the exchange of queens with 12 ♕e2 if he wants to castle – this will no doubt upset the sort of player who wants to attack from the outset, all the more so because Black has a lot of counterplay in the endgame.

Restraining e4-e5

As Black has renounced ever playing e7-e5, he has to make sure that e4-e5 doesn't work for White. A common method we have already seen is to play ♘f6-d7, when the black knight and bishop on g7 both cover e5. Indirect prevention is also possible, for example by applying pressure to the white pawn on d5. Thus if Black sticks his knights on b6 and f6 and puts the queen on a8 or b7 then any e4-e5 thrust is likely to cost the d5 pawn. Direct prevention with the pawn move f7-f6 is usually hideous

as long as Black has a dark squared bishop – though the games of Michael Adams and others have shown it may be ■ good idea if preceded by a bishop exchange.
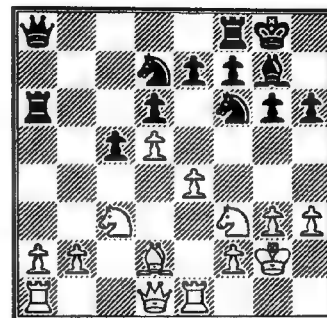

An extract from the game **Grabliauskas – Khalifman**, Vilnius 1997. Khalifman has just captured the knight on c3 with **15...♗xc3** and after White recaptured **16 bxc3** he played **16...f6!** when **17 ♗d2 ♕■■! 18 ♕e1 ♕■■** gave Black control ■v■r the light squares on the queenside and a grip on the e5 square. It would be extremely problematical for White to achieve the e4-e5 break through.

The conditions have to be exactly right for a strategy involving ♗xc3 to work. Basically Black has to be so strong on the light squares that the loss of dark square control doesn't matter.
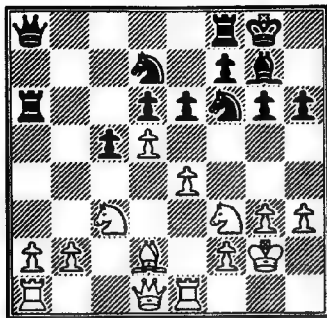
Black plays in the centre with e7-e6

Returning once again to the opening moves, a big question is whether the black queen should be leading from the front – on a5 or b6 – or be tucked away on a8.

Here is ■ typical scenario which is reached after the moves **1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 ■ ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 ■■ ♗xf1 8 ♔xf1 d6 9 g3 ♗g7 10 ♔g2 ♘bd7 11 ♘f3 0-0 ■■ h■ ♖a6 13 ♗g5 h6 14 ♗d2 ♕a8 15 ♖e1**.

Black can play for queenside pressure as in the examples we have seen above with **15...♖b8**. For example **16 b3 ♘e8 17 ♖e2 ♘c7 18 ♖c1 ♘b5 19 ♘xb5 ♖xb5 20 a4 ♖b8** when there is a target on b3. On a8 the queen is less vulnerable to attack than on a5, but also less involved in the action – it is a matter of choice.
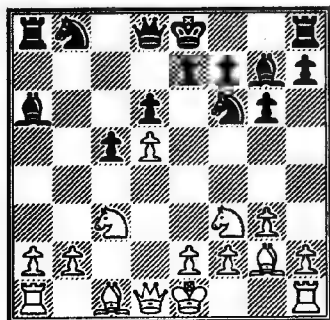
There is however another completely different plan available for Black. Although the basic idea behind the Benko is to put pressure on the queenside, in this specific variation it is hard to resist the temptation to try to exploit the position of the white king. After all, White has taken liberties by 'fianchettoing' him on g2. If only Black could open the diagonal a8-h1 things might get embarrassing for the white monarch, who would find the pin on f3 very awkward. Black c■n undertake the double edged plan of cutting through the thickets to g2 with **15...e6**, launching an assault on d5.

Then after the exchange 16 dxe6 fxe6 Black already has a useful open file for his rook on f8. For this reason it would be silly for Black to play ♖b8 if he plans e7-e6 as the rook is more useful on its starting square. The next stage of Black's plan would involve d6-d5 to remove the second obstacle on e4. However this must be done with care. The position is highly complex and is examined in some detail in the Tricks and Traps chapter.

White plays a kingside fianchetto

After 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 White is by no means compelled to give up castling with 7 e4 ♗xf1. Instead he can fianchetto his bishop on g2 with 7 ♘f3 ♗g7 8 g3 d6 9 ♗g2
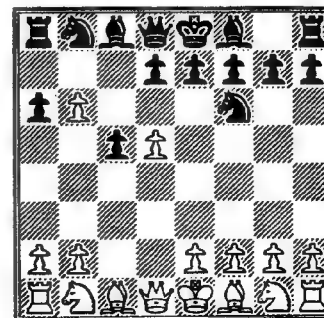

Now, instead of castling immediately, Black should finesse with 9...♘bd7 as 10 0-0?! ♘b6! prevents White unwinding his game with ♖b1, b2-b3 and ♗b2. The point is that if 11 ♖b1? ♗c4! wins back either the a2 or d5 pawns. The trick with 10...♘b6! was widely praised as it was believed to render the fianchetto system harmless. However, White can by-pass it by playing 10 ♖b1! instead of castling, so that if 10...♘b6 11 b3 prevents 11...♗c4. White therefore gets to mobilise his queenside in the best possible style. This is a critical line in the Benko and is analysed in detail in the next chapter.

White avoids taking the second pawn

There are several extremely interesting ways for White to decline the capture on a6, ranging from the ultra-sharp 5 ♘c3 to the solid and very popular 5 b6. Recent developments in all these lines are analysed in the next chapter, so we shall be selective in our discussion here.

The positional 5 b6

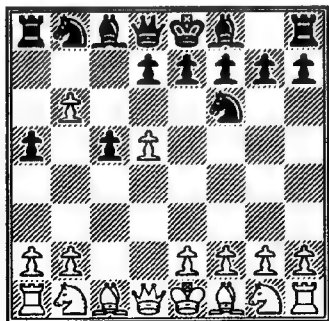1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 b6!?

White gives back the pawn immediately but in doing so he deprives the black bishop of a6 – which means, among other

things, that White will be able to play e2-e4 without worrying about losing the right to castle after ♗xf1. The black rook on a8 is also kept shut in. Therefore Black's freedom of action is restricted and if he responds passively he can quickly find himself in a bind. Here are three possible replies.

Firstly **5...e6!** is a bold and critical reaction which counterattacks immediately in the centre. The plan is to win the c6 square for the knight by eliminating the white d5 pawn. This will clear the way for Black to play ♖b8 and ♖xb6 when the rook can attack b2; it will also open a strong diagonal for the bishop when it moves to b7. Black will be left with weak centre pawns on c5 and d7, or doubled pawns on c5 and c6 if White desires; on the other hand he can use the rook to counterattack against b2. This move will be analysed in detail in the next chapter.

Secondly **5...a5** plans to build up in 5 bxa6 style with ♗a6, d7-d6, ♘bd7 and ♘xb6. In other words, Black gets most of the benefits of the Benko Gambit Accepted without giving up a pawn. Unfortunately for Black it is all too time consuming, and White can prepare a quick attack in the centre.
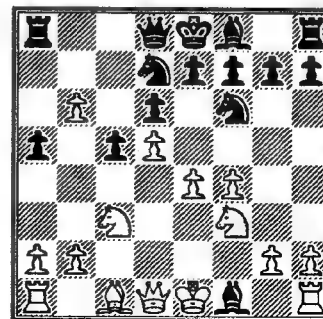
A.Blees White
J. Markus Black
Hoogeveen 1999

6 ♘c3 ♗a6 7 f4!

This crosses Black's plans. In breathtakingly blunt fashion White intends to power through the centre with e4-e5. He moves his f pawn before he blocks it in with ♘f3, but waits to play e2-e4 until he can recapture on f1 with the rook rather than the king.

7...d6 8 ♘f3 ♘bd7 9 e4 ♗xf1

10 b7!

Despite White's basically crude plan this is a very clever subtlety. The black rook is forced to b8 where it soon becomes a target for the white bishop.

10...♖b8

If 10...♖a7 11 ♖xf1 ♕c7 12 e5 is even worse as the pawn on b7 might even get to queen with the support of ♗f4.
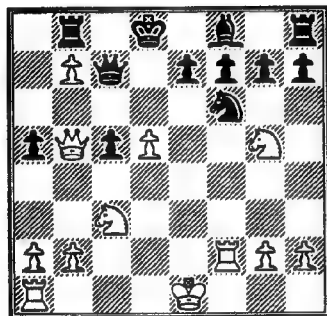
11 ♖xf1 ♕c7

White won a piece after 11...♘b6 12 e5! dxe5 13 fxe5 ♘fxd5 14 ♘g5! f6 15 ♘e6 ♕d7 16 ♘xd5 because of the knight forks in J.Levitt – E.Gullaksen, London 1999.

12 e5! dxe5 13 fxe5 ♘xe5 14 ♗f4

The centre has been sliced open with ■ black bishop ■n f8 and rook on h8 still asleep – it's no wonder that direct attacking play wins the day for White.

14...♘d3+ 15 ♕xd3 ♕xf4 16 ♕b5+ ♔d8 17 ♖f2 ♕c7 18 ♘g5!

Black has been dismantled on the queenside, in the centre and now ■n the kingside – that's a lot to face in only 18 moves.

18...♖xb7 19 ♘xf7+ ♔c8 20 ♕c6 ♖g8 21 ♖xf6! 1-0

Black stays a rook down or gets mated on e8. It's sad for Black to lose in the Benko without ever getting to use his Benko bishop – so watch out for the e4-e5 advance.

Thirdly **5...d6** is ■ safer way to play in the style of the mainline, though Black has less space to manoeuvre. He intends ■o recapture on b6 either with ♕xb6 or the manoeuvre ♘bd7 and ♘xb6. On the whole ♕xb6 looks the preferable method, though if he wishes White ■an put his knight on the useful c4 square with gain of time by attacking the black queen after ♘f3-d2-c4. Another idea for White is the pawn advance a2-a4 to take away the b5 square from the black minor pieces; or he

could push the pawn one square further to a5 to take control of the b6 square. Black is solid but rather passive – though at least he isn't ■ pawn down!

J.Delemarre *White*
V.Baklan *Black*
Brussels 2000

The diagram position was reached after the moves **1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 b6 d6 6 ♘c3 ♘bd7?! 7 ■■ ♘xb6 8 e4 g6 9 a5 ♘bd7 10 f4 ♗g7 11 ♗c4 0-0 12 ♘f3**

Black is suffering from 'one knight too many' syndrome – ■ common ailment in the Benko, but especially severe if he has played passively against the 5 b6 variation.
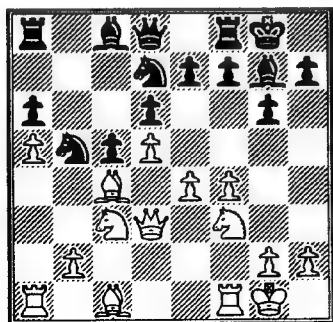
Here he would dearly love to be rid of the knight on d7, which has little scope – it is denied the b6 square by the pesky pawn on a5, and is also kept out of e5. The beleaguered knight also hinders the bishop on c8. As if this wasn't ■ problem enough, Black also has to reckon with the looming e4-e5 advance.

So Black's position looks very dismal. However, Baklan decided to make the best of a bad job. He came up with an inspired manoeuvre to ease the congestion in his camp:

12...♘e8!

The knight begins a long journey. An immediate benefit ■ that the bishop on g7 is unleashed which prevents, or ■■ least renders much more problematical, ■ white advance with e4-e5.

13 0-0 ♘c7 14 ♕d3 ♘b5!

If now 15 ♘xb5 axb5 16 ♗xb5 ♖xa5 would considerably ease things for Black – he has activated his pieces and emerged with the better pawn structure.

15 ♗d2 ♘d4!

And not 15...♘xc3 16 ♗xc3, when the exchange of dark squared bishops would favour White.
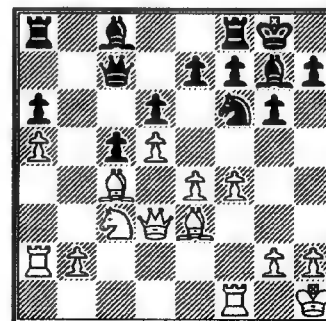
16 ♘xd4

It was perhaps more precise to play 16 ♘a4!? aiming to force the exchange of dark squared bishops. Then 16...♖a7 17 ♗c3 ♘xf3+ 18 ♕xf3 ♗xc3 19 ♘xc3 gave White a persistent edge in V.Tukmakov – J.Polgar, Amsterdam 1990.

16...♗xd4+ 17 ♗e3 ♗g7!

There are some pieces Black is desperate to exchange, but others that he is keen to keep: the dark squared bishop isn't on the For Sale list.

18 ♖a2 ♕c7 19 ♔h1 ♘f6

If you compare the situation now with the diagram position at move 12 you will see that in effect the white knight on f3 and the black knight on d7 have vanished. White still has his imposing centre, but Black's camp is less crowded than before. Baklan managed to outwit his opponent in a tactical battle and won after 43 moves.
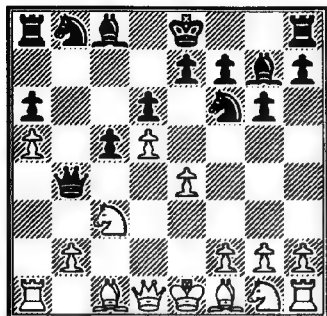
Black played too passively in the game above. After all, did he really offer the pawn ■ move three just so that he could sit inside a solid fortress and watch his opponent try to break in? Here is a far more energetic approach.

T.Hillarp Persson *White*
S.Conquest *Black*
Torshavn 2000

The opening moves were 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 ■ cxb5 a6 5 b6 d6 6 ♘c3 g6!? – rather than 6...♘bd7 – 7 e4 ♗g7 ■ a4 ♕xb6 9 ♞5 ♕b4!

A very important moment. By first going to b4 before retreating the black queen provokes the white rook onto a4, where it no longer defends the first rank and will be a potential target.

10 ♖a4

There isn't much choice as e4 needs to be defended and if 10 ♕c2? ♘xe4 or 10 ♗d3? ♘xd5! (even better than10...♘xe4 which allows White to confuse things with 11 ♕a4+ ♕xa4 12 ♘xa4) 11 exd5 ♗xc3+ 12 bxc3 ♕xc3+ 13 ♗d2 ♕xd3 and Black wins easily.

10...♕b7 11 ♘f3 0-0 12 ♘d2

The knight heads for c4 in order to establish a bind on the queenside, but it takes time and meanwhile White is falling behind in development. Nevertheless if 12 ♗e2 then 12...♗d7! – directly exploiting the rook on a4 to get the bishop to an active square – 13 ♖a3 ♗b5! 14 0-0 ♘bd7, as in J.Campos Moreno – V.Topalov, Aviles 1992, looks very comfortable for Black.

12...e6!

Black prefers to have activity with a weak pawn on d6 rather than allow White to impose a bind unhindered with ♘c4.
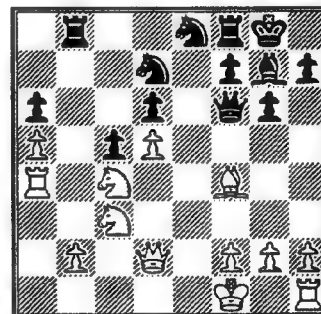
13 ♘c4 exd5 14 exd5 ♗g4!

Having cajoled one white rook onto the poor a4 square, Black now plans to shut the other rook out of the game by denying its king the right to castle.

15 ♗e2 ♗xe2 16 ♔xe2

Necessary, as retaking with the queen or knight loses the d5 pawn.

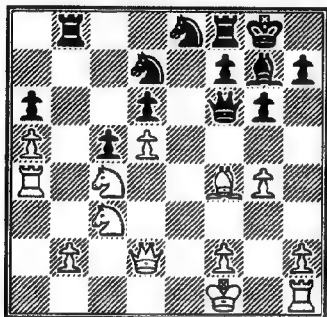**16...♕e7+ 17 ♔f1 ♘bd7 18 ♗f4 ♘e8 19 ♕e2 ♕f6 20 ♕d2 ♖b8**

If now White goes hunting the exchange with 21 ♗g5 ♕f5 22 ♗e7 then Black can exploit the defects of the white rooks. On a4 and h1 they are both targets, and they have left the back rank weak: 22...♗xc3! 23 ♕xc3 ♖b1+ 24 ♕e1 ♕c2 25 ♕a1 (all these moves by the white queen have been more or less forced) 25...♘ef6! (the knight heads for e4 to exploit the weakness of the f2 square) 26 ♗xf8 ♘e4 27 ♕e1 ♖e8! (with ideas of 28...♘g3+ uncovering an attack on the white queen) 28 ♘e3 ♕xa4 and Black wins.

Instead White played

21 g4?

to take away the f5 square from the black queen. It also clears the g2 square for the king, which will in turn free the rook on h1 to join in the battle in the centre. In other words, White is poised to undo all the harm caused to his rooks.

However Conquest found a way to strike immediately with

21...g5!! 22 ♗xg5 ♛f3

As will soon be seen, the black queen not only directly attacks the rook on h1, but indirectly threatens the rook on a4.
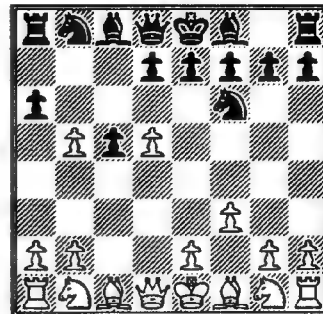
23 ♖g1 ♗xc3!

The white queen is overloaded, as if 24 bxc3, keeping the black queen out of d1, then 24...♖b1+ forces mate. Here again the white rooks aren't doing their duty – one of them should be guarding the back rank.

24 ♛xc3 ♛d1+ 25 ♔g2 ♛xd5+ 0-1

Rather than take the rook Black decides he wants the bishop. White resigned as after 26...♛xg5 he will be a piece down for nothing.

The venomous 5 f3
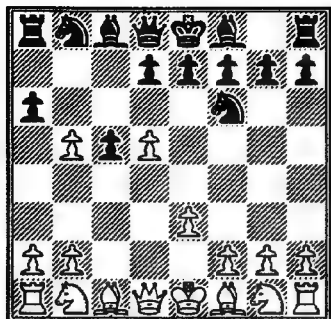
1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3

A quiet move, but it contains a lot of poison for the unwary. For example, White can establish a grip on the centre after 5...axb5 6 e4 (already threatening ♗xb5) 6...♛a5+ 7 ♗d2 b4 8 ♘a3! when next move ♘c4 puts the knight on an excellent blockading square.

However, 5 f3 has the drawback of taking away the precious f3 square from the white knight – and this means that Black has a chance to play much more actively if he is prepared to sacrifice the queen! This line is analysed in the next chapter.

The double-edged 5 e3

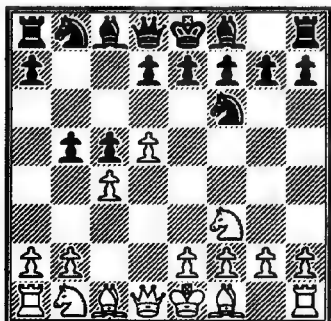**1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3**

Why on Earth does White move his e-pawn only one square, when it will clearly be necessary to play e3-e4 in the near future? The point is that he wants to maintain the right to castle, which vanishes after 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 ♘f3 ♗g7 8 e4 ♗xf1. White loses time by playing e2-e4 in two goes with 5 e3, but he hopes this will prove of less consequence than the disruption of forfeiting castling.

For some time it was thought that this was a nice, safe way for White to keep the advantage. Then Black found a good way to counterattack with 5...axb5 6 ♗xb5 ♕a5+ 7 ♘c3 ♗b7 and the variation has been drifting in and out of fashion ever since. Here also you are directed to the next chapter for all the details.

The Gambit Declined

Finally White can decline the gambit altogether, most notably with 4 ♘f3.

The main danger for Black in these lines is that he will be hit on the head with e4-e5: yes, some things never change in the Benko.

White plays ♘f3 and aims for a quick e4-e5

After 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 ♘f3 Black has to make an important choice. A very good thing about 4...♗b7 is that it cuts out any nonsense with 5 cxb5 because d5 is left hanging. Therefore White can't change his mind and grab the gambit pawn after all. In contrast after 4...g6 5 cxb5 a6 White could try the interesting 6 ♕c2 or even 6 b6!? when he has sneakily avoided the e7-e6 lines that occur after 4 cxb5 a6 5 b6 e6.

On the other hand, 4...♗b7 delays the development of the kingside which makes a potential e4-e5 even more dangerous. And the bishop itself might end up worse placed on b7 than it would be on c8.
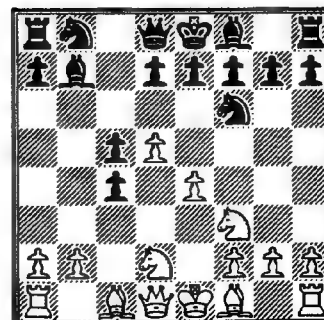
White can build up with either 5 ♘bd2 bxc4 6 e4 or 5 ♕c2 bxc4 6 e4. Here is a drastic example of the peril that Black faces if he fails to take sufficient counter measures against the advance e4-e5.

T.Radjabov White
O.Salmensuu Black
Torshavn 2000

1 **d4** ♘**f6** 2 **c4 c5** 3 **d5 b5** 4 ♘**f3** ♗**b7** 5 ♘**bd2 bxc4** 6 **e4**
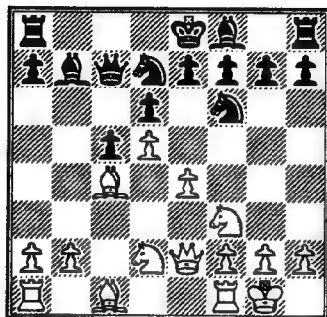
6...♛a5?

The aim of the game move is to prevent 7 ♘xc4, but Black is falling seriously behind in development. It was better to challenge White's centre immediately with 6...e6! for example 7 dxe6 dxe6! 8 e5 ♘d5 9 ♘xc4 ♝e7 when Black has a grip on the d5 square, and the pawn on c5, though isolated, is controlling d4. Black managed to exploit his ascendancy down the d file after 10 a3 0-0 11 ♝d3 ♘c6 12 ♛e2 ♘b6 13 0-0 ♘xc4 14 ♝xc4 ♛c7 15 ♖e1 ♖ad8 16 ♝d2 ♘d4! in Hoang Thanh Trang – T.Fogarasi, Budapest 2003.

7 ♝xc4 d6 8 0-0 ♘bd7 9 ♛e2!

White cannot be accused of playing in too sophisticated a style. He prepares e4-e5 without any more ado. For example if 9...g6 10 e5 dxe5 11 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 12 ♛xe5 ♝g7 13 d6 e6 14 d7+! – also quite sufficient is the materialistic 14 ♘b3 planning to annex the pawn on c5 – 14...♚xd7 15 ♘b3 followed by 16 ♘xc5+ with a decisive attack.

10 b4!!

A magnificent decision. White clears the way for ♝b2, so that 10...cxb4 can be answered by the brutal 11 ♝b2 g6 12 e5!

At the same time he hits the c5 pawn – an important bastion in Black's position as it both guards the d4 square and blocks the c file.
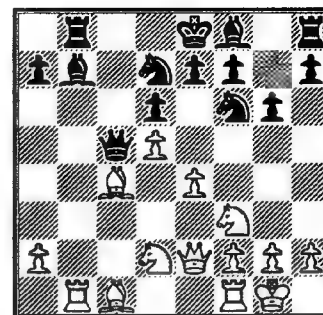
10...g6 11 bxc5 ♛xc5

Black had no good way to recapture. If 11...dxc5 12 e5 would be murderous, while 11...♘xc5 12 e5 dxe5 13 ♘xe5 ♝g7?! 14 d6 exposing a double attack on f7 is also horrible for Black.

12 ♖b1!

Radjabov gets his rook out of any danger from a black bishop on g7 and puts it on a useful attacking square before making the central breakthrough.

12...♖b8

13 e5!

The thunderous finale of White's dynamic build up.

13...dxe5 14 ♘xe5 ♝g7 15 ♘xd7 ♚xd7

A rather embarrassing way to recapture, but Black is being annihilated after 15...♘xd7 16 ♘e4 ♛c7 (17 ♘d6+ wins against

any other sensible moves) 17 d6 ♕c6 18 ♗xf7+! when if
18...♔xf7 19 ♘g5+ leads to ■ quick mate.

16 ♗b5+ ♔d8 17 ♗c6 ♔c7 18 ♘b3 ♕d6 19 ♗f4! 1-0

After 19...♕xf4 20 ♕xe7+ ♔c8 one of several gruesome ways
to finish the game is 21 d6 intending mate on c7.
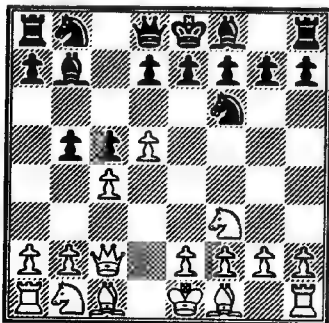
White plays an early ♕c2

This can take various forms. For example, the immediate 4 ♕c2;
or 4 ♘f3 g6 5 ♕c2; or even 5 cxb5 a6 6 ♕c2. In all cases White
intends to get in e2-e4 without losing the right to castle. It isn't
often that moving the queen so early in the opening is ■ good
idea, but other moves with the same idea – such ■ 5 f3 and 5
e3 above – ■■■ also not without their faults.

S.Conquest *White*
J.Degraeve *Black*
France 2001

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 c5 3 d5 b5 4 c4 ♗b7 5 ♕c2

The other way of limbering up for e4-e5. As we shall see, in this
game Black is not only unafraid of the move but positively invites
White to play it!

5...bxc4 6 ■■ g6

Black could put pressure on the white centre with 6...e6 which
would be a better way to justify having a bishop on b7.
For example 7 dxe6 dxe6!? 8 e5 ♘d5 9 ♗xc4 ♘c6 10 0-0 ♗e7;
■■ 7 ♗xc4 exd5 8 exd5 ♗e7 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♘c3 d6 intending
♘d7-b6 with a safe game as in S.Alonso – O.Salmensuu, Ubeda
1999. This isn't particularly exciting for Black but after 6...g6 he
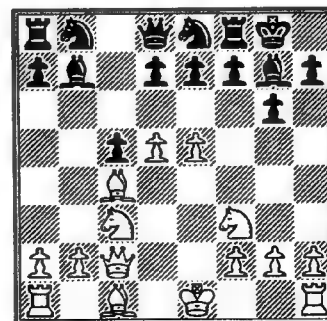gets ■ lot of excitement of the wrong kind.

7 ♗xc4 ♗g7 8 ♘c3

Here rather than the passive but safe 8...d6. Black played the
casual
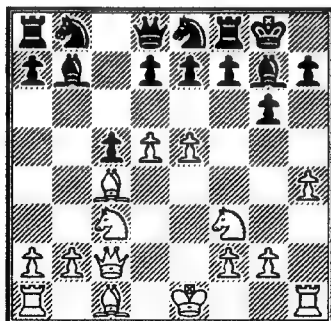
8...0-0?

no doubt thinking that after

9 e5 ♘e8

White had over extended himself – after all, surely the centre
pawns can be broken up with 10...d6 and 11...♘d7 etc. when
Black will have a pleasant game?

But Black had misjudged the dynamics of the position, which White exploited with

10 h4!!

to begin a direct attack on the black king. Here the time factor is crucial: Conquest has judged that he will be able to conclude the onslaught before Black can strike a meaningful counterblow in the centre. This was a vital calculation as with the white king still sitting in the centre, the failure of White's attack would no doubt lead to the loss of the game.

The game continued

10...d6 11 h5!

No time is to be lost!

11...dxe5 12 hxg6 hxg6

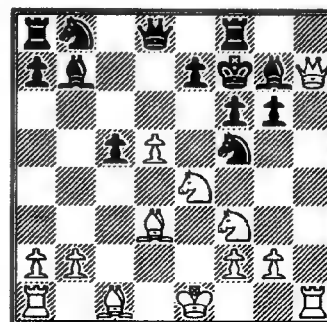If 12...fxg6 13 d6+ ♔h8 14 ♕xg6 would be ugly indeed for the black king.

13 ♖e4

Sometimes chess is a simple game: the queen just heads for the h file.

13...♘d6 14 ♕h4 f6 15 ♗d3!

The bishop has found a deadly diagonal as if 15...f5 16 ♘g5 quickly terminates things, as does 15...♕e8 16 ♕h7+ ♔f7 17 ♗xg6 mate.

15...e4 16 ♘xe4 ♘f5 17 ♕h7+ ♔f7

Now comes a satisfying tactical denouement.

18 ♘eg5+! fxg5 19 ♘e5+ ♔f6 20 ♕xg6+ ♔xe5 21 ♕e6+ ♔d4 22 ♕e4 checkmate!

The alternative 4...g6 fared better in the following game.

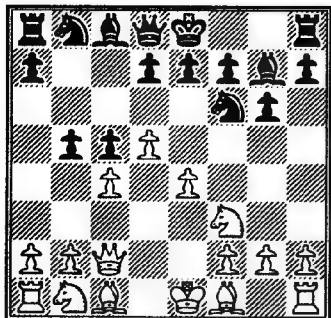**Hoang Thanh Trang** *White*
M.Prusikhin *Black*
Budapest 2003

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 ♘f3 g6 5 ♕c2

There is a sharper alternative: 5 cxb5 a6 6 ♕c2 axb5, e.g. 7 e4 (7 ♕xc5 e6!? would be too risky for White) 7...♕a5+ 8 ♗d2 ♕a4! (the desire to exchange queens manifested in another form. If instead 8...b4 9 ♘a3 intending 10 ♘c4 looks good for

White.) 9 ♕xa4 bxa4 10 ♘c3 ♗g7 11 e5 (White feels compelled to play actively as if left in peace Black might achieve all the plusses of a Benko mainline without being a pawn down) 11...♘g4 12 ♗f4 f6! 13 exf6 ♘xf6 14 a3 0-0 15 0-0-0 (one of those rare occasions when White castles queenside as the rook now bolsters d5 and the king defends b2) 15...d6 16 ♖e1 ♖a7 17 ♗b5 ♖a6 18 ♗xa4 as in E.Bareev – V.Topalov, Sarajevo 2000, and now according to Bareev writing in *Informator* Black would be better after 18...♘g4! 19 ♗g3 ♗xc3 20 bxc3 ♗c4 21 ♗d1 ♗xd5, splitting up the white centre.

5...♗g7 6 e4

6...0-0!

Black makes do without d7-d6. That means he will be even quicker with a counter-attack on White's centre. If now 7 e5 ♘g4, and you can see how useful it is for Black to have his bishop still on c8 rather than committed to b7 as after 8 ♕e4 d6 the knight on g4 is defended; or 8 ♗f4 d6 and besides the attack on e5 White has to reckon with 9...♗f5.

7 cxb5 ♗b7

Only now does Black put his bishop on b7, as after White's capture on b5 the fizz has gone out of any e4-e5 advance – it will leave d5 hanging.

8 ♘c3 e6!

The correct way for Black to handle this type of centre is to challenge for the light squares.

9 d6?

Instead after 9 dxe6 fxe6 the black centre will open umbrella like with d7-d5. Still, the game move is very loosening as both d6 and e4 are exposed to attack. The simple developing move 9 ♗e2 was much to be preferred with unclear play.
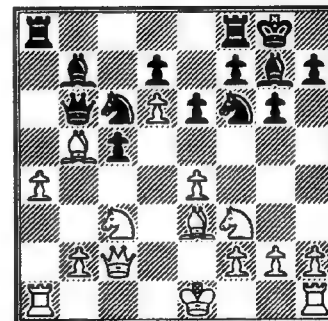
9...a6

Black wants to be rid of the pawn which obstructs him from developing his knight to c6.

10 ♗e3 axb5 11 ♗xb5

11 ♗xc5 ♘a6!? 12 ♗e3 b4 followed by a capture on e4 would be too risky for White.

11...♕b6 12 a4 ♘c6

Whatever may be the objective assessment of the position it is exactly the sort of thing Black hopes to get when he plays the Benko. He has every piece on an active square, a solid centre

and a safe king. Meawhile there are potential targets galore in White's position: the d6 and e4 pawns, the bishop on e3, the d4 square, and, as will be seen, the knight on f3.

13 0-0 ♘d4! 14 ♕d3 ♘g4

After 14...♘xf3+ 15 gxf3 the black knight is kept out of the g4 square. So first of all Prusikhin takes the chance to clear the way for f7-f5.
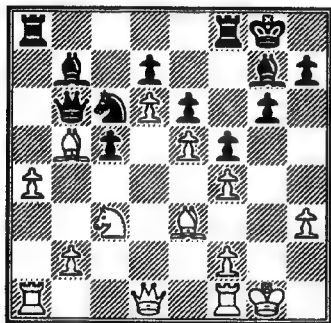
15 h3

White decides that a weakened kingside is a price worth paying for being rid of the dominant knight on d4.

15...♘xf3+ 16 gxf3 ♘e5 17 ♕d1 f5!

The thematic continuation of the attack on the light squares which began with ♗b7 and e7-e6.

18 f4 ♘c6 19 e5

19...g5!

This flanking blow is a curious mirror image on the kingside of the Benko move 3...b5. It undermines the support of e5 and at
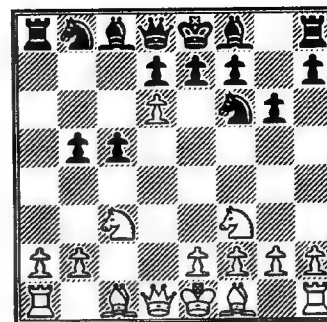
the same time opens the g file to facilitate the attack on the white king.

20 ♗h4 gxf4 21 ♘d5?

Losing without a fight. Necessary was 21 ♗xc5, though after 21...♕d8 the transference of the black queen to the kingside would strengthen the projected attack. The rest is just nasty:

21...exd5 22 bxc5 ♕d8 23 ♕xd5+ ♔h8 24 ♗xf4 ♕h4 25 ♗c1 ♖g8 26 ♖a3 ♘a5 27 c6 dxc6 28 ♕c5 ♗xe5+ 0-1

Besides ideas of ♕c2, only one other try after 4...g6 deserves to be mentioned, namely 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 ♘f3 g6 5 cxb5 a6 6 ♘c3 axb5 7 d6!?
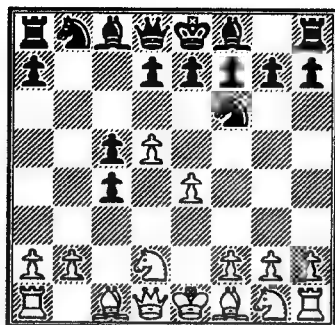

in which White takes the chance to give his opponent a disjointed pawn structure. Nevertheless, in the Benko most of Black's problems stem from the fact that he has passive pieces rather than an imperfect pawn structure, and here with 7...♗b7 or 7...♕a5 he achieves a lot of active play. Futhermore it is possible for Black to spurn the recapture on b5 and get on with his development with 6...♗g7 7 e4 0-0. The thrust d5-d6 now has a lot less power behind it as Black hasn't spent a tempo with

6...axb5, nor in doing so given White the attacking option of ♘xb5. The game T.Radjabov – I.Nemet, Biel 2000 continued 🛡 bxa6 d6 9 ♗e2 (White would like to wait with this move, so that if Black plays ...♗xa6 he could reply ♗f1xa6 saving ■ move; but unfortunately for him there is no constructive way to wait) 9...♗xa6 10 0-0 ♛b6 11 ♖b1 ♘bd7 12 ♖e1 ♖fb8, and Black held the balance.

Other ideas.

Along with coverage of all the well established variations, you will find off beat ideas briefly outlined in the Details chapter. These include 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 ♘d2!? when after 4...bxc4 5 e4 there is an important nuance for Black.
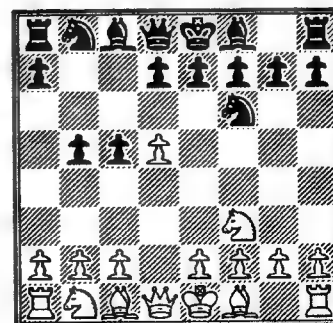
White achieves an ideal piece deployment after 5...d6?! 6 ♗xc4 g6 7 b3 ♗g7 8 ♗b2 but with the clever move 5...c3! Black disrupts this perfect build up. After 6 bxc3 g6 White can't have ■n open diagonal for the bishop on b2 without blocking the useful square c4 with c3-c4.

White plays 2 ♘f3

Finally White can avoid the whole business of the Benko proper with the dastardly move 2 ♘f3.
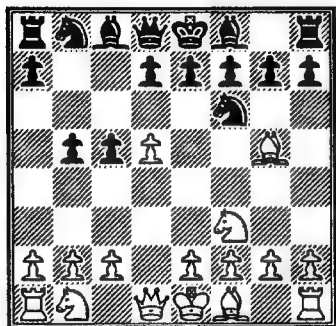
1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3

An annoying move if you were hoping to play the Benko, but you can still try 2...c5 3 d5 b5!?

This is more than just obstinancy on the part of Black. The pawn on b5 is performing a logical function – it controls the c4 square and so undermines any future support of White's spearhead on d5 with c2-c4. It is also ready to attack the white knight with b5-b4 if it goes to its natural square on c3. Therefore 3...b5 ы rendering problematical two of White's key moves in Queen Pawn openings: c2-c4 and ♘c3.

If White responds with 3 c4 then we are back in proper Benko territory. That sometimes happens, for example Conquest – Degraeve, given earlier, began like this. The fact that White has committed himself to 2 ♘f3 means that he is deprived of the chance to play any Benko lines involving a quick f2-f4 or f2-f3.

The plus side for White is that he can achieve a speedier development than after 2 c4. Therefore he should try to exploit this to inflict some disruption on Black's position with 4 ♗g5

This really is the only dangerous move, though as the following game shows it can be more dangerous for White than Black.
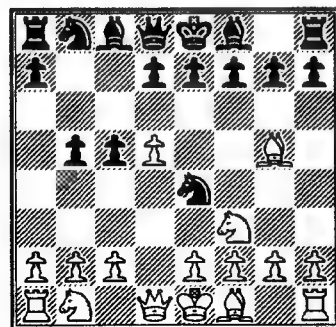
M.Lodhi *White*
E.Ghaem Maghami *Black*
Turkey 2000

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 c5 3 d5 b5 4 ♗g5

Here 4 a4 has also been tried, but simply 4...♗b7 would leave White wondering how to defend his d5 pawn – perhaps transposing to a harmless variation of the Benko with 5 c4 would be the answer, when if 5...bxc4 (6 b4!?) 6 ♘c3.
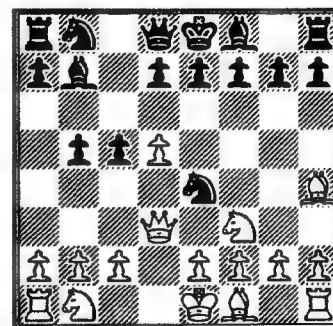
4...♘e4

5 ♗h4

It's worth preserving the bishop as 5 h4 g6 6 ♘bd2 ♘xg5 7 hxg5 ♗g7 is harmless as long as Black leaves his king in the centre and mobilises his pieces for action on the queenside or in the centre.

Instead after 6 ♕d3 ♘xg5 7 ♘xg5 g6! White decided it was too risky to capture on b5, which rather spoils the point of putting the queen on d3. For example if 7 ♕xb5 ♗g7 8 c3 ♘a6 intending 9...♖b8 etc. looks very dynamic for Black. Instead after 7 e4 ♗g7 8 c3 0-0 9 ♗e2 e6 10 ♘f3 exd5 11 ♕xd5 ♕b6! (a clever way to develop the bishop on b7 as of course if 12 ♕xa8? ♗b7) 12 ♘bd2 ♗b7 13 ♕b3 c4 14 ♕d1 d6 Black's strong bishops ruled the roost in V.Golod – V.Topalov, Bugojno 1999.

5...♗b7!

The attack on the d5 pawn is the basis of Black's strategy in this variation.

6 ♕d3

6...f5!

A key move in this variation. Black shouldn't even dream of playing 6...♘d6 when the white pawns roll forward with 7 e4

Instead he supports his knight in the centre despite the loosening of his pawn structure. Of course, 7 ♕xb5 ♗xd5 would be a delightful swap for Black.
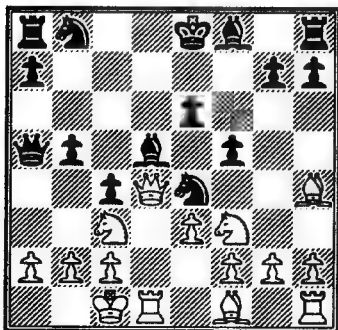
7 ♘c3?

A natural move, but it turns out to be a serious blunder as White falls into a ghastly pin. One of the good things about avoiding 2 c4 is that White still has the option of the solid move c2-c3. He should have utilised it here with 7 ♘bd2 ♘a6 – threatening to win at once with 8...♘b4 – 8 c3! and White keeps some advantage in this unclear position.

7...c4! 8 ♕d4 ♕a5!

The pin on c3 is highly awkward for White. To make matters even worse the white queen finds herself strangely boxed in on d4 and a target for the black pieces.

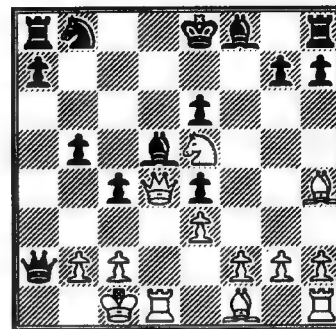## 9 e3 e6 10 dxe6 dxe6 11 0-0-0 ♗d5!

Blocking the d file is the complete answer to White's attack. Now there is the terrible threat of 12...♘c6 trapping the white queen.

12 ♘xe4

If 12 ♘xd5 ♘c6 13 ♘f6+ ♗xf6 defends against mate on d7, when the double threat to the white queen and a2 is decisive.

12...fxe4 13 ♘e5 ♕xa2

Here White played the despairing 14 ♘xc4 but resigned after 14...♘c6 as his queen is lost. If instead 14 ♕xe4 hoping against hope for 14...♗xe4?? 15 ♖d8 mate, then 14...♕a1+ 15 ♔d2 ♕xd1+! would also lead to a quick shower.

What's Hot?

The aim of this chapter is to give you some guidance about where you should be focusing your preparation in the Benko. Basically it should be on two things:

Firstly, the popular theoretical lines that are most likely to come up in tournament games; and secondly, the sharp attacking lines which will send you to the underworld in around 20 moves if you don't know anything about them.

Of course in some cases the popular lines also happen to be the most aggressive – which gives you two things to worry about, a possible surprise new move and the danger of going wrong in the complications. On the other hand, you are less likely to forget the key moves in a sharp variation if you face it regularly in your games. I find it is more irritating when my opponent hits me with a sharp off beat line I haven't faced for ten years (it always seems to happen in the third round of a Swiss tournament terribly early on a Sunday morning).

Theory is forever advancing. Systems come in and out of fashion as new moves are discovered and methods of play are refined. If you regard the middlegame as unexplored territory, then theory is like the incoming tide of the sea (or possibly the River Volga) that edges a bit further up the beach each time and then retreats again, taking a bit more of the land with it.
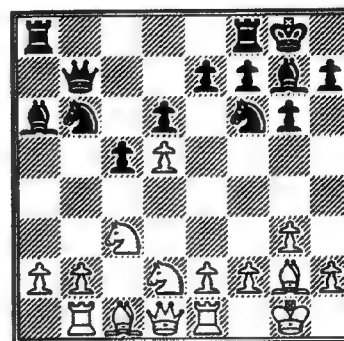
Nothing can resist this gradual erosion of the middlegame. If you played through Alburt's beautiful win against Hort in the heroes

chapter you have probably been mesmerised by its beauty and want to play the same way as Black. Indeed, a whole generation of players trembled to go near this line as White for fear of suffering a similar fate. It wasn't until a game in 2000 that Grandmaster Grigore showed the chess world what was really happening in the opening.

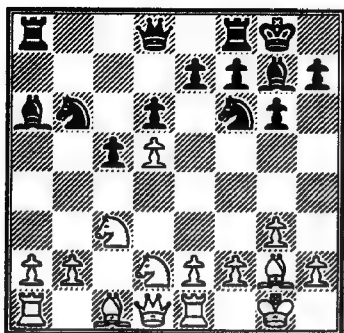**G.Grigore** White:
R.Costantini Black
Cesenatico 2000

Here he played **14 b4!** which is much stronger than Hort's 14 b3. Why not take advantage of the fact that Black has put his queen on the same line as the white rook? There followed **14...cxb4 15 Xxb4 Wc7 16 &b2 Xfb8 17 &a1!** The bishop has found its ideal diagonal and hides away from danger on a1. Unless Black can do something fast he is in trouble as the compensation for the pawn is evaporating. Alas, there is no queen sacrifice available in 'Alburt style'. The game finished **17...⌐c4 18 Xxb8+ Xxb8 19 ⌐b3!** As well as embarrassing the black queen and getting the bishop to a1, with 14 b4! White has opened up the route to c6 for his knight. **19...Wb6 20 Wd4! Wb4 21 Wa7 &c8 22 ⌐d4 Xb7 23 ⌐c6!** Now Black is forced into the exchange of queens. **23...Xxa7 24 ⌐xb4 Xa3 25 ⌐c6 &f8 26 Xb1!** The finish had to be well calculated. **26...⌐e8 27 Xb3 &xc3** It looks as if Black is going to regain his

pawn, but...**28 Ξxa3! ♗xa1 29 Ξa8 ♗d7 30 Ξd8** The point. After 30...♗xc6 31.dxc6 the passed pawn rolls through, while otherwise the light squared bishop runs out of squares. **31...♗f5 31 e4 ♗g4 32 f3 1-0** The bishop gets trapped by a curtain of white pawns after 32...♗h5 33 g4.

This reversal in no way denigrates Alburt's achievement versus Hort – he played with imagination and energy to produce the greatest Benko game ever seen. Creatively speaking, we should all be pleased that Grigore has added a pretty game to the folk lore of the Benko Gambit.
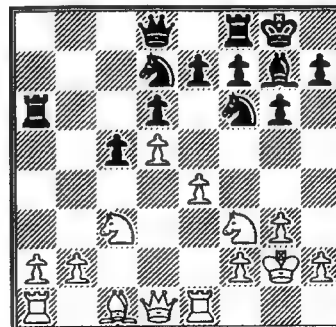
However, it does mean that if you copy Alburt's moves against a well booked opponent you are likely to end up in trouble. The good news is that this line is hardly critical and Black can get perfectly sufficient counterplay if at move 12 he leaves his queen at home.
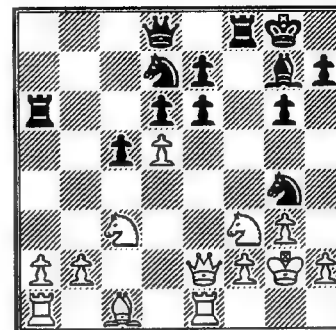

For example, instead of 12...♕c7 he could try 12...♘e8, planning the knight manoeuvre ♘c7-b5, or perhaps 12...Ξa7!? possibly planning the same idea as in the Alburt game but with the queen on a8 rather than b7. Alternatively, after 12...♕c7 13.♘d2 he could just play the straightforward 13...Ξfb8.

Here is another example of an advance in theory, this time far more benign for Black.

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 e4 ♗xf1 8 ♔xf1 d6 9 ♘f3 ♘bd7 10 g3 ♗g7 11 ♔g2 0-0 12 Ξe1 Ξa6

Here White has tried the no nonsense **13 e5**, which aims to break Black's position in half with the minimum of preparation. After **13...♘g4 14 e6** the capture **14...fxe6!** looks very sensible, as it opens the f file and keeps the black centre intact.
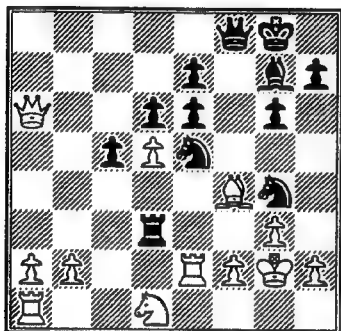

However, in pre-2000 Benko books you will read that it actually *loses* to **15 ♕e2** with the double threat of 16 ♕xa6 and 16 ♕xe6+.

It is surprising therefore that after 15 ♕e2 Black has managed to score 3/3! (Moral: see what happens in master games, don't take on trust what it says in books.)

This discrepancy between theory and results is due to the fact that Black has discovered that **15...♘de5!** gives him an excellent attack. If 16 ♘xe5 ♖xf2+ picks up the white queen with ♙ clear advantage despite the complications, while 16 ♕xa6 gives Black a choice of captures on f3 with fine chances in either case. Here is one bloodthirsty example: **16 ♕xa6 ♖xf3 17 ♖e2 ♕f8 18 ♘d1 ♖d3 19 ♗f4**

19...g5! 20 ♗xe5 ♕f3+ 21 ♔h3 ♗xe5 22 ♕c8+ ♔g7 23 ♕xe6 ♕xe2 24 ♘c3 ♘xf2+ 25 ♔g2 ♕f3+ 26 ♔g1 ♘h3+! 27 ♕xh3 ♗d4 mate as played in D.Bekker Jensen – S.Petrosian, Hamburg 2000.

It is rare for improvements on known theory to be as devastating as this. Thus ♙ less dramatic, but highly noteworthy addition to Black's resources was discovered some years ago against the 'maverick' move 5 ♘c3.

The outrageous ♙ cxb5 a6 5 ♘c3!? meets its match

First of all I want to point out that

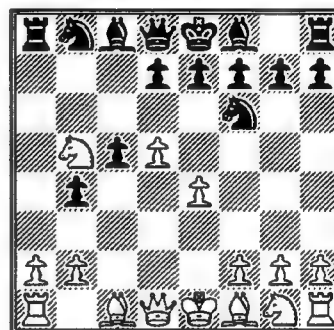**1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 ♗xa6 ♙ ♘c3**

curiously is the same as

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 ♘c3 axb5 ♙ ♘xb5 ♗a6 7 ♘c3

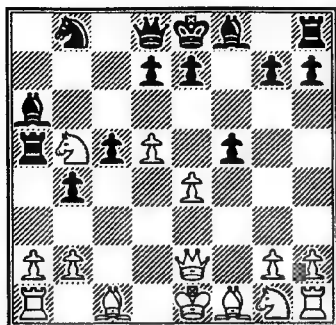So 5 ♘c3 could turn out to be a bizarre way to reach the mainline Benko.

However, the issue under discussion is:

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 ♘c3 axb5 6 e4!? b4 7 ♘b5

The good news for White is that his knight has found an outpost square deep in enemy territory where it can influence the centre. The bad news is that the knight is trapped – any attempt to escape from b5 spells instant death. On the other hand, it cannot be attacked by a black pawn and if necessary can be supported by a2-a4. Meanwhile the immediate threat is 8 e5, driving the black knight back in ignominy to g8.

And if **7...♘xe4??** then white knight has the last laugh: **8 ♕e2** when if **8...♘f6 9 ♘d6 mate!** Some surprisingly strong players have fallen for this trick – the biggest victim was ♙ player rated 2420. In one example Black saw the threat after **8 ♕e2** and battled on gamely with **8...f5 9 f3 ♖a5!?** (alas if the knight moves it's still mate on d6) **10 fxe4 ♗a6** Black now regains his piece, but...
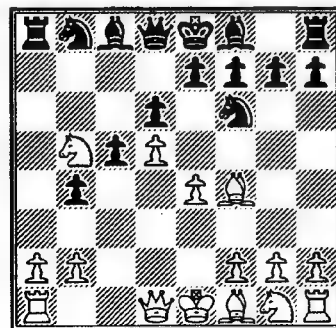
11 exf5! ♗xb5 12 ♕h5+ g6 13 fxg6 ♗g7 (the only way to prevent instant disaster) **14 gxh7+ ♔f8 15 ♕f5+ ♔e8** (it's mate in two after 15...♗f6) **16 ♕g6+ ♔f8 17 ♗h6 1-0** A.Zontakh – D.Milanovic, Belgrade 1998. The black king is entirely defenceless after 17...♗xh6 18 ♕xh6+ ♔f7 19 ♘f3 intending 20 ♘e5+ or 20 ♘g5+.

So White's threats have to be taken very seriously – ■ surprised opponent is unlikely to escape alive.

7...d6!

Necessary.

8 ♗f4

Giving Black ■ second chance to commit suicide – 8...♘xe4? 9 ♕e2 when if 9...♘f6 10 ♘xd6+ ♔d7 11 ♕b5+ ♔c7 12 ♘e8 is double checkmate!
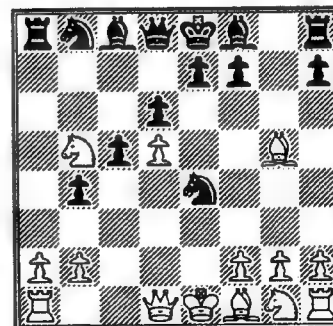
8...g5!

After deflecting the white bishop from the attack on d6 Black is able to capture safely the e4 pawn. At the same time he clears the g7 square for his bishop with gain of time.

9 ♗xg5

On 9 ♗g3? ♘xe4 10 ♕e2 ♘xg3 ruins White's attack, but 9 ♗e3!? certainly deserves attention. If you wish you can check it up in the Details chapter.

9...♘xe4

10 ♗f4

The plus points for Black are that he has destroyed the mobility of White's pawn centre – he can no longer be terrorised by the e4-e5 advance which proves a bane in many lines of the Benko. Furthermore, he has left White with ■ pawn on d5 which will prove very hard to defend: this pawn can be attacked by ♗b7, ♘b8-d7-b6 and ♘e4-f6, and even ♕f5 in some lines. There is

also the question of the knight on b5, out on a limb on the queenside. This too can be attacked directly with ♗a6 and ♛d7, etc.
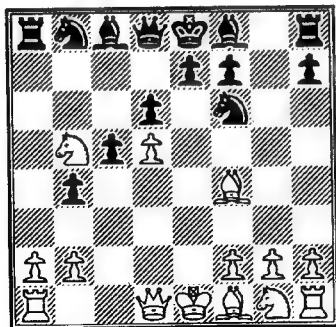
On the other hand, White still has a lead in development and he hasn't given up hope of conquering d6. And the absence of a black pawn on g6 means that he can try to build up an attack by putting a knight on f5 or h5; also a bishop stationed on d3 can take a direct aim at h7.

Still, how successful can a kingside attack hope to be when there is a knight on b5 that is cut off from the action and a pawn on d5 that needs constant defence?

In chess books prior to the late nineties the move 10...♗g7 is universally recommended, with the wild continuation 11 ♛e2 ♘f6 12 ♘xd6+ ♚f8 13 ♘xc8 ♛xc8. While Black has a lot of dynamic play for the pawn, positionally speaking it rather lets White off the hook – he has not only got rid of his problem knight on b5 but he has exchanged it for a healthy bishop and won a pawn to boot!

These days Black has become much meaner and prefers
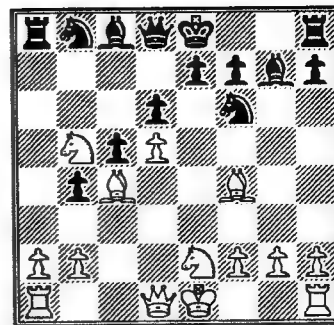
10...♘f6!!

A paradoxical decision. The knight isn't attacked and Black is behind in development, but he still prefers to retreat his knight forthwith. Now after 11 ♛e2 ♖a6! defends d6 after which 12...♘xd5 is hard to meet. Let's look at a big name game in this line.

W.Arencibia *White*
V.Ivanchuk *Black*
Cap d'Agde 1998

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 ♘c3 axb5 6 e4 b4 7 ♘b5 d6 8 ♗f4 g5 9 ♗xg5 ♘xe4 10 ♗f4 ♘f6!! 11 ♗c4 ♗g7 12 ♘e2

12...♘bd7!

No time is to be wasted in getting the knight to b6 where it attacks both d5 and the bishop. If instead Black spends a move on castling, then after 12...0-0 13 ♘g3 ♘bd7 White has the chance to play 14 ♘f5!? as the bishop on c8 has temporarily lost control of the f5 square.
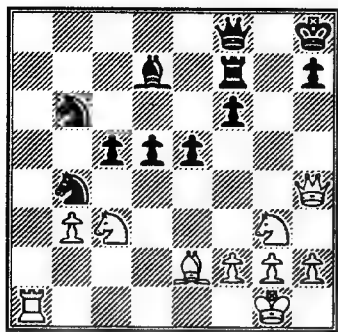
13 ♘g3 ♘b6 14 b3 0-0 15 0-0 ♗d7

Already White has no good way to meet the attack on his knight and the d5 pawn. Arencibia therefore jettisons the d5 pawn and stakes everything on a kingside attack.

16 ♕d2 ♘fxd5! 17 ♗h6 ♗xh6 18 ♕xh6 f6

It takes some nerve to allow the white queen to set up residence so near your king, but Ivanchuk has correctly judged that by putting his king's rook on f7 and the queen on f8 he will neutralise the attack.

19 ♗d3 ♖f7 20 a4 bxa3 21 ♘xa3 ♕f8 22 ♕h4 ♘b4 23 ♗e2 d5 24 ♘b5 ♖xa1 25 ♖xa1 ♔h8 26 ♘c3 e5!

The black pawns have began to flex their muscles. If this had been a slow rate game I'm sure Ivanchuk would have won easily, but the Cuban Grandmaster managed to save himself by generating complications after 27 f4!? Still there is no doubt that 10...♘f6! looks more promising than the long established 10...♗g7.

So far we have looked at some examples of individual moves that have reshaped theory. Now we shall examine a couple of fashionable variations, in which an 'arms struggle' is taking place.
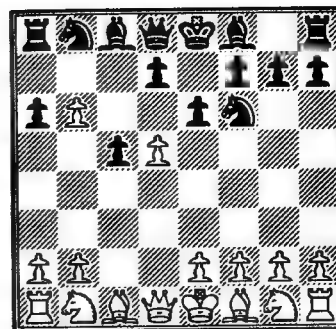
Black's counterattacking variation 4 cxb5 a6 5 b6 e6!

After 5 b6 d6 Black keeps a solid, fautless pawn structure but leaves himself with few aggressive options; meanwhile 5...a5 is a little too risky. Therefore in modern tournament play Black has mostly preferred 5...e6 accepting a compromised pawn structure in return for piece activity.

I.Ivanisevic White
J.Degraeve Black
Bled 2002

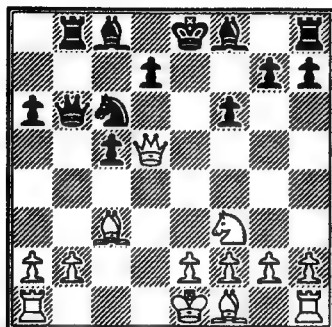**1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 b6 e6!**

Played in the spirit of the Blumenfeld. White will now gain the better pawn structure, but the black pieces can't be kept under lock and key – which was White's original intention in keeping things blocked up with 5 b6.

6 ♘c3 ♘xd5 7 ♘xd5 exd5 8 ♕xd5 ♘c6 9 ♘f3 ♖b8 10 ♗g5

The white bishop heads for c3 via g5! This embodies an interesting strategical plan, but Degraeve is able to defeat it with some vigorous play.

10...f6 11 ♗d2 ♕xb6 12 ♗c3

Now White is ready to play 13 e4 and 14 ♗c4 intending 15 ♕f7+ etc. with decisive threats against the black king who is trapped in the centre – thanks to 10 ♗g5 which provoked 10...f6. With White only two moves away from proving his opening strategy to be a complete success, Black must quickly generate counterchances.

12...♘b4! 13 ♕d1 d5!

Now White's plans have been overthrown and his attempt to continue to play sharply in the centre just leads to more trouble.

14 ♗f7?

He had to make do with 14 e3

14...d4 15 ♗xb4 ♕xb4+ 16 ♘d2 ♗d6 17 b3 ♗f4!

The pin in d2 is highly awkward as it keeps the white king trapped in the centre.

18 g3 ♗g4! 19 ♗e2 ♗xe2 20 ♕xe2 d3!
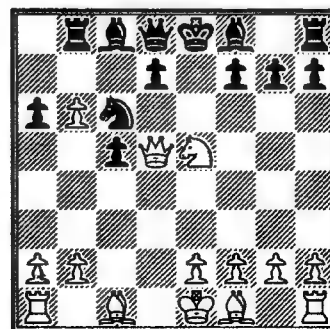
A decisive opening of lines.

21 ♕xd2 ♖d8 22 ♕xd8+ ♔xd8 23 gxf4 ♔e7 and White hadn't enough for his queen and lost quickly.

P.Deiler *White*
J.Degraeve *Black*
Metz 2000

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 b6 e6 6 ♘c3 ♘xd5 7 ♘xd5 exd5 8 ♕xd5 ♘c6 9 ♘f3 ♖b8 10 ♘e5

A ferocious looking move. The threat is 11 ♕xf7 mate and if 10...♘xe5?? 11 ♕xe5+ wins the rook on b8. Meanwhile Black also has to reckon with 11 ♘xc6. Therefore his reply is forced.

10...♕f6 11 ♘xc6 dxc6 12 ♕f3

After 12 ♕e4+ ♗e7 13 g3 0-0 14 ♗g2 ♖xb6 15 0-0 ♗e6 16 ♕a4 ♖d8 Black's tremendous activity and pressure on b2 compensated for his shattered queenside pawns in L.Van Wely – B.Gelfand Cap d'Agde 1996.
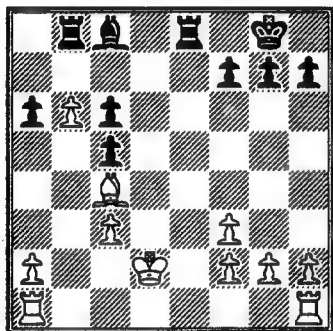
12...♗e7!

Black acquiesces to the exchange of queens, but only at the high price of getting his bishop aimed at b2 after 13 ♕xf6 ♗xf6.
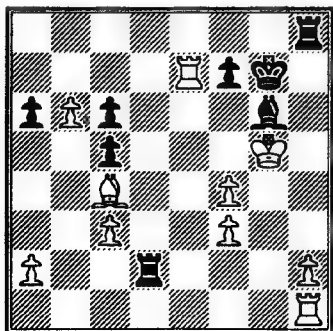
13 ♗d2!

The best try to keep up the pressure.

13...♛xb2!?

Black boldly accepts the pawn. Instead after 13...♛xf3 14 exf3 ♗f6 15 ♗c3 ♗xc3+ 16 bxc3 0-0 17 ♗c4 ♖e8+ 18 ♔d2 a curious position was reached in C.Crouch – L.Trent, Camberley 2001.

White still has his passed pawn on b6 and queens have been exchanged, but his king still finds himself being hunted. There followed 18...♗f5 19 ♖ae1 ♖ed8+ 20 ♔e3 g5! building a net around the white king 21 f4 g4 22 ♖ h5 23 ♔f2 ♖d2+ 24 ♔g3 gxf3 25 gxf3 ♔g7 26 ♖e7 h4+ 27 ♔xh4 ♖h8+ 28 ♔g5 ♗g6
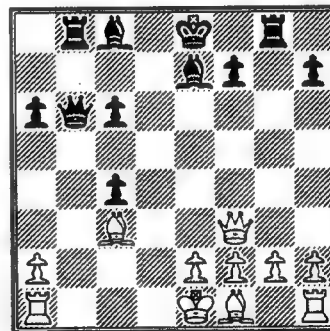
29 ♖e2?? Black's attacking play finally pays off. Instead.White could have wriggled out with 29 f5! which seems to indicate that Black's attack was all a bluff – though admittedly it was a very powerful bluff! 29...♖xe2! 0-1. Here White saw to his horror that after 30 ♗xe2 f5! the wanderings of his king are over and mate follows on h5.

14 ♗c3 ♛xb6 15 ♗xg7?

The no-nonsense move is 15 e4! e.g. 15...♗e6 16 ♛g3 was played in J.Parker – P.Claesen, Mondariz 2000, and here 16...f6! looks critical as 17 ♛xg7 ♖g8 18 ♛xh7 c4! gives Black counterplay as in the Degraeve game.

15...♖g8 16 ♗c3 c4!!

Who says double and isolated pawns are weak? The black c-pawn not only clears the way for the bishop to go to c5 or b4 to join in the attack, but will also strike the final blow of the game.

17 ♛e4

White despairs of being able to complete his development and so goes on a useless queen hunt to win more pawns. If instead 17 e4 ♗g4 18 ♛e3 ♗c5 19 ♛d2 ♛b1+! wins.

17...♗e6 18 ♛xh7 ♖g5 19 e3 ♗b4 20 ♛c2 ♛a5 21 ♗xb4 ♖xb4 22 ♔e2 c3! 0-1

White resigned as 23 ♕xc3 ♗c4+ 24 ♔d1 ♖b1+ 0-1 costs him the queen.

The attempt to profit through giving Black doubled pawns therefore seems to falter in the face of dynamic counterplay.

E.Gleizerov *White*
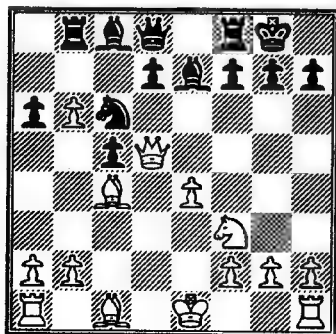**P.Tregubov** *Black*
Krasnoyarsk 2003

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 b6 e6 6 ♘c3 ♘xd5 7 ♘xd5 exd5 8 ♕xd5 ♘c6 9 ♘f3 ♖b8 10 e4

A less ambitious but nevertheless dangerous move. White develops in straightforward style and aims to exploit the static weaknesses in Black's pawn structure: namely the hole on d5 and the backward pawn on d7.

10...♗e7

Not 10...♘b4? 11 ♕e5+ and wins. Black develops his bishop so that he can meet White's next move by castling – a more economical deployment than 10...♖xb6 11 ♗c4 which forces him to use his queen to defend f7.
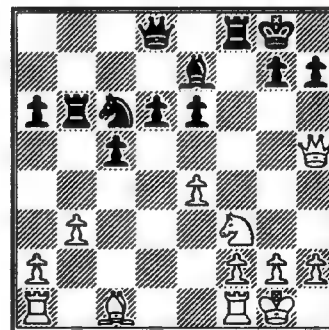
11 ♗c4 0-0

12 ♕h5

A finesse: after 12 0-0 Black could simply answer 12...♖xb6. when 13 ♕h5 d6 transposes, but in addition he has the interesting option 12...♘a5!? to drive the white bishop from the diagonal where it controls d5. Then 13 ♗d3 ♖xb6 14 ♕h5 d5!? leads to an unclear position.

12...d6 13 0-0 ♖xb6 14 b3! ♗e6

Black challenges the white bishop: if he is allowed to play 15...♗xc4 then 16 bxc4 leaves the pawn on c4 as a serious weakness. There is nothing to be gained by 14...♗f6 as White can win the two bishops after 15 ♘g5 ♗xg5 16 ♗xg5, with a slight edge.

15 ♗xe6 fxe6

Black can be pleased that the hole on d5 has vanished and his centre pawns have flexibility again; but he still has to be careful as both e6 and d6 are vulnerable to attack, and the rook on b6 is on a poor square. Gleizerov begins to probe the black centre pawns.

16 ♕g4 ♕c8 17 ♗b2 ♗f6

A move like 17...e5 creates a strong square for the black knight on d4, but it is double edged as it fixes the black pawns in a rigid structure that can also be exploited by the white knight – 18 ♕xc8 ♖xc8 19 ♘d2 ♘d4 20 ♘c4 and White has any winning chances in the position. Therefore Tregubov prefers to meet the threat of mate on g7 by offering the exchange of bishops, though this means that the d6 pawn loses one of its guardians.
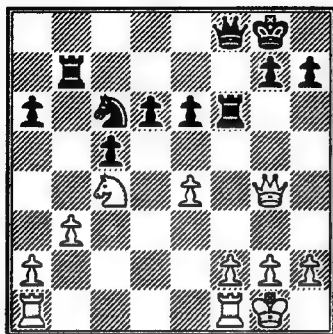
18 ♗xf6 ♖xf6 19 ♘d2!

The knight heads for c4 where it will attack both the black rook on b6 and the d6 pawn.

19...♕f8!

The queen both defends the d6 pawn and breaks the pin on the e6 pawn so that the advance d6-d5 becomes feasible.
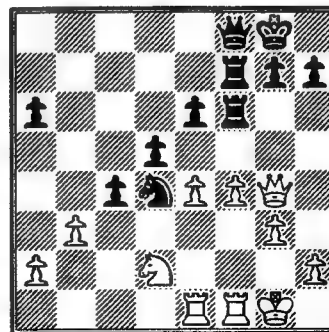
20 ♘c4 ♖b7

21 f4!

White gains space and takes the f4 square away from the black rook. Now Black has to reckon with 22 e5 splitting up his pawns or even in the future ♘xd6 followed by a pawn fork on e5. Less precise was 21 ♖ad1 ♘d4 22 e5?! when 22...♖f4 23 ♕h3 d5 gives Black a solid centre.

21...♖bf7 22 g3 d5

Tregubov has defended accurately and now can use his pawns to generate counterplay.

23 ♘d2 ♘d4 24 ♖ae1 c4!

While all the heavy pieces are engaged in a stand off on the kingside Black creates a passed pawn on the queen's wing.

25 exd5 exd5 26 bxc4 dxc4 27 ♘e4

If 27 ♘xc4 ♕c5, with the double threat of capturing the knight and a discovered check, looks too risky for any non-computer to contemplate. Therefore White focuses on generating attacking chances against the black king.

27...♖c6 28 ♘g5 ♖e7 29 ♕d1 ♖d7 30 ♖e4 h6

After this exchange sacrifice Black's passed pawn ensures him a draw but nothing more. Fritz recommends the cold blooded 30...♖d8!? ruling out any pins on the d file and preparing to answer 31 ♖xd4 with 31...♕c5 32 ♘f3 ♖cd6 when Black regains his material with a clear advantage.

31 ♘e6 ♖xe6 32 ♖xe6 ♕c5 33 ♖e8+ ♔f7 34 ♖e3 c3 35 f5 ♖d8

36 ♔g2!

White gains the draw by calmly stepping out of the potential pin.
36...♘c2 37 ♕xc2 ♕xe3 38 ♕b3+ ♔f6 39 ♖f3! ♕e5

Instead, 39...♖d2+ 40 ♔h3 ♕xf3 41 ♕e6+ ♔g5 42 ♕g6 mate
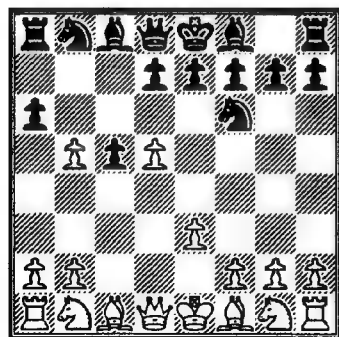would be embarrassing.

**40 ♕xc3 ♕xc3 41 ♖xc3 ♖d2+ 42 ♔f3 ♖xa2 43 g4 ♖xh2 44
♖c6+ ♔f7 ½-½**

The life and death variation 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3

Although the main theoretical battles in this variation were
fought some years ago, you are still certain to get your fingers
burnt if you go into combat knowing nothing about it. This
variation comes in and out of fashion and has caught many
victims.

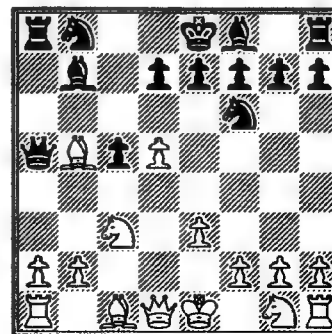**1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3**

White is prepared to play e2-e4 in two goes rather than one as
he wants to retain the right to castle.

5...♗b7

An aggressive response to the anaemic looking 5 e3. White has
been slow defending d5 and so Black plans to undermine it with
e7-e6. This plan will work all the better with the bishop on b7,
as the bishop will not only attack d5 but also put indirect
pressure on g2 once White recaptures on b5 with his bishop.
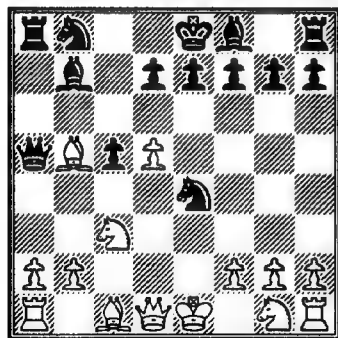
6 ♘c3 axb5 7 ♗xb5 ♕a5

The variation with 8 ♗d2 caused a lot of excitement some years
ago, but now it seems to have been neutralised by 8...♕b6 9
♕b3 e6 10 e4 ♘xe4! 11 ♘xe4 ♗xd5 12 ♕d3 ♕b7! 13 f3 c4! 14
♗xc4 ♗xc4 15 ♕xc4 d5 16 ♕c2 dxe4 17 ♕xe4 ♕xe4+ 18
fxe4 ♘d7 and Black will win his pawn back with either ♘c5 or
♖a4, with equal chances. Alternatively, if 9 ♗c4 e6 10 ♕b3
♕xb3 11 ♗xb3 ♘a6! 12 f3 ♘b4 is awkward for White in
Y.Zimmerman – A.Chernin, Hungary 1999.

White is therefore obliged to give up one of his centre pawns if
he wants to try for the initiative – but which one? He has tried
both 8 ♘ge2 and 8 e4 here.

White gives up his e-pawn

8 e4 ♞xe4

If you didn't know this was theory you might think that White had forgotten his knight was pinned and just blundered the e-pawn!
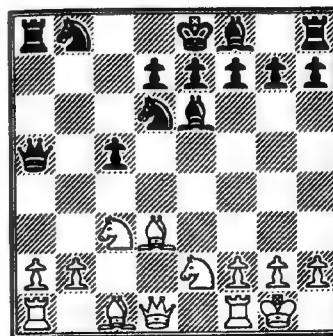
9 ♞ge2 ♞d6 10 ♗d3

The most radical move. White gives up his whole pawn centre to open up lines against the black king. While objectively I believe Black must stand well here, the practical difficulties shouldn't be underestimated.

The alternative was 10 ♗a4. GM Davor Komljenovic, an expert on this variation, was doing okay after 10 ♗a4 g6 11 0-0 ♗g7 12 ♗g5 ♞f5! defending e7 as a prelude to 13...0-0 in R.Montecatine – D.Komljenovic, Benasque 1993.
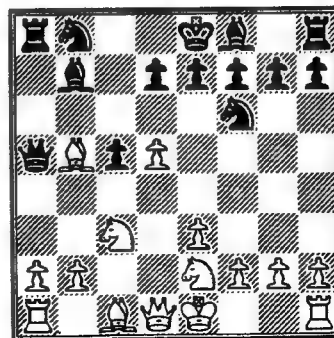
10... ♗xd5 11 0-0 ♗e6!?

A clever idea that has never been refuted. The bishop bodily blocks the attack on the e7 pawn. Black stood excellently after 12 f4 g6 13 ♞e4 ♞f5 14 ♞4g3 ♞c6 15 ♞xf5 gxf5 16 ♞g3 c4

17 ♗c2 h5! 18 ♞xh5 ♞b4 19 ♞g3 ♛b6+ 20 ♚h1 ♗g7 in S.Estremera Panos – D.Komljenovic, Pamplona 1995.

The black king is, in a way, castled in the centre, while his pieces are active on the wings. Furthermore he has an astronomical advantage in pawns in the centre. One reason I trust 11...♗e6 is that Komljenovic had faced the same player in 1992 in this variation and played the more obvious 11...♗c6. He had won that game too but after some frights. So 11...♗e6 was the result of three years gestation, and not a random decision made at the board. The strength of the move is verified by the fact that when they played again the Spanish player chickened out with 1 c4!

White gives up his d-pawn

This should be treated with respect as it has been used by heavyweights such as Kramnik and Shirov.
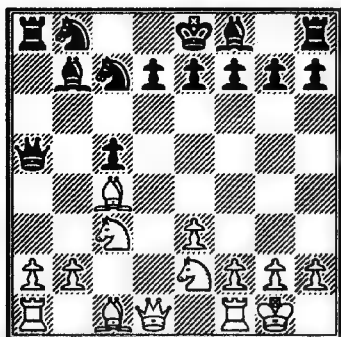
8 ♘ge2 ♘xd5

8...♗xd5 isn't bad either.

9 0-0 ♘c7!?

Usual is 9...♘xc3 10 ♘xc3, but the game move is interesting and avoids the theoretical minefield.

10 ♗c4

10...e6!

Black wisely delays the development of his queen's knight. After 10...♘c6 11 ♗d2 things get awkward for the black queen after 11...♕a7 12 a4 e6 13 ♘b5! However, 10...e6 has neutralised this by leaving c6 free for his queen: 11 ♗d2 ♕b6 12 ♘a4?? ♕c6 now wins a knight.
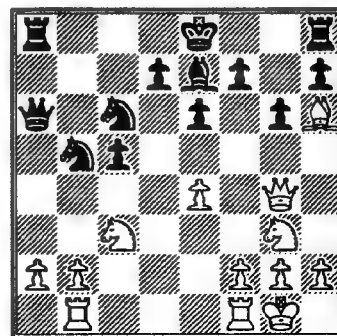
11 e4 ♗e7 12 ♘g3

White goes for an all out assault on the kingside, but unfortunately there is no king there to attack. As in the example

above, the black king is content to sit in the centre and let his pieces work on the flanks around him.

12 ♗f4 was sensible, but 12...0-0, planning 13...♖d8 defending d7, followed by ♘c6. looks fine for Black.

12...♘c6 13 ♗d2 ♕b6 14 ♖b1 ♗a6 15 ♗xa6 ♕xa6 16 ♕g4 g6 17 ♗h6 ♘b5!

The knight heads for d4 to plug the d file, after which White's rooks will have no open lines.

18 ♘ge2 ♘bd4 19 ♘g3 ♖g8 20 ♗f4?!

White has run out of ideas and returns his bishop to the centre. That at least prevents 20...♘e5, but now Black's play on the flanks is triumphant.

20...h5! 21 ♘xh5?

Obviously White didn't want to submit to 21 ♕d1 h4 22 ♘ge2 h3!? but this capture is disastrous.

21...♖h8 22 ♘g7+

White is doomed to lose a piece for if 22 ♘g3 ♖h4 picks up the bishop.

22...♔f8 23 ♘xe6+ dxe6

and Black won in D.Shapiro – B.Annakov, New York 2000.

There are two golden rules for Black in this line. First, he mustn't hurry to castle kingside; and second he should develop with e7-e6 and ♗e7 rather than g7-g6 and ♗g7. I can't avoid showing you what happened to Black when he broke these rules in ■ recent game:
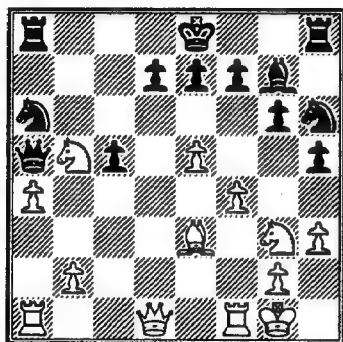
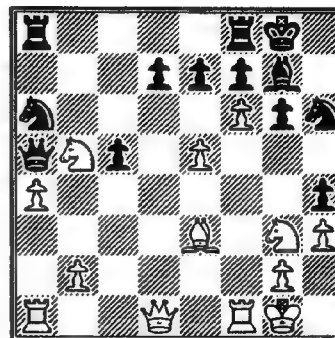**V.Babula** White
J.Stocek Black
Czech Republic 2000

The opening moves had been

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 axb5 6 ♗xb5 ♛a5+ 7 ♘c3 ♗b7 8 ♘ge2 ♗xd5 9 0-0 ♗c6!? 10 a4 g6? (10...e6!) **11 e4! ♗g7** (11...♘xe4? 12 ♗xc6 ♘xc3 13 ♗xd7+ ♘xd7 14 ♘xc3 is excellent for White) **12 e5! ♘g4 13 f4 h5 14 h3 ♘h6 15 ♗e3 ♗xb5 16 ♘xb5 ♘a6 17 ♘g3**

Now Black tried to buy off the attack with **17...0-0?** offering the d7 pawn, but the only chance of survival was to keep the king in the centre as White spurned material in favour of a kingside attack.

18 f5! h4 19 f6!

With the black queen shut out of the game on a5 you only have to count pieces to know that this must be overwhelming. Nevertheless, the winning method is very pretty.
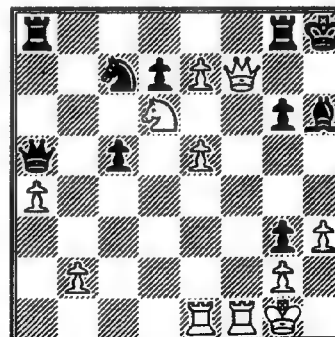
19... hxg3 20 fxe7!!

White prefers to take a pawn rather than the bishop! This is ■n astonishing decision until you realise that the key thing is to break through on f7.

20...♖fe8 21 ♗xh6 ♗xh6 22 ♛f3

Exactly: now f7 falls as 22...♖xe7 drops the rook on a8.

22...♘c7 23 ♛xf7+ ♔h8 24 ♘d6 ♖g8 25 ♖ae1!

White is still a piece down but the strength of his passed pawn, far safer king and superior piece coordination is decisive. The final battle, which includes a sham queen sacrifice, is enthralling:

25...♕d2 26 ♖e4 ♘e8 27 ♘c4 ♕g5 28 ♖g4 ♕h5 29 ♘b6! ♖b8 30 ♘xd7 ♖xb2 31 ♖xg3 ♖d2 32 ♘f6 ♘xf6 33 exf6 ♕e5 34 ♕xg8+ ♔xg8 35 f7+ ♔h7 36 e8=♕ ♕xg3 37 ♕g8 mate.

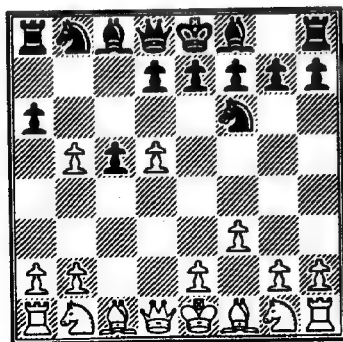**The Queen Sacrifice Variation: an exciting adventure after 5 f3**

The line 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 axb5 6 e4 ♕a5+ 7 ♗d2 b4 8 ♘a3 d6 9 ♘c4 ♕d8 is playable for Black, but did you really offer the gambit pawn at move three in order to end up in this passive position? A heavily analysed and much disputed queen sacrifice reveals a far more exciting way to handle the black pieces.

B.Lalic *White*
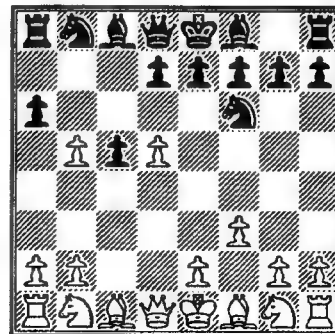**A.Khalifman** *Black*
Linares 1997

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3

Michael Adams, a one time Benko aficionado, writes with some irritation about this move in his autobiography *Chess in the Fast Lane*: 'I find it most surprising that such a stupid looking move can be so strong'. Of course he was writing two years before Khalifman sacrificed his queen.

5...e6!

Far more enterprising than 5...axb5 6 e4 ♕a5+ 7 ♗d2 b4 8 ♘a3! d6 (much better than 8...♗a6 9 ♘c4 which led to trouble for Black in the Gurevich – Miles game given in the Tricks and Traps chapter) 9 ♘c4 ♕d8 10 ♗d3 e6! 11 dxe6 ♗xe6 12 ♘e2 d5 13 exd5 ♘xd5 and now either 14 ♘f4 or 14 0-0 gives White some advantage.

6 e4

If 6 dxe6 fxe6 gives Black a very nice version of the Blumenfeld. He can develop effortlessly with d7-d5, ♗d6 and 0-0 when a strong sacrifice, possibly on e4, should appear by itself. The move f2-f3 would then look very foolish.

6...exd5 7 e5

The critical move which seeks to reduce Black's opening to absurdity.

7...♛e7

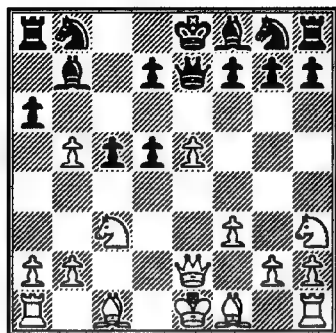The white queen must be distracted from d1 as 7...♞g8 8 ♛xd5 ♜a7 9 ♝c4 would be horrid for Black.

8 ♛e2 ♞g8

The black knight is obliged to return home, but on the other hand White's development hasn't been sinless either – in fact after 8 moves the players have only managed to develop their queens!

9 ♞c3 ♝b7

Black must hold onto the d5 square, but after...

10 ♞h3!

he is faced with 11 ♞f4 when d5 is attacked again.

10...c4!

It takes this crazy looking move to keep Black alive in the variation. The c5 square is vacated for the queen so that 11 ♞f4 can be answered by 11...♛c5, when Black holds onto d5 – and

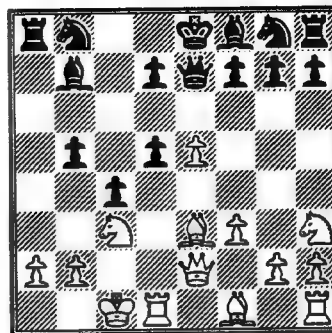as another plus point the queen clears the e7 square to allow some good old fashioned development.

11 ♝e3

White keeps the black queen out of c5 and so renews the idea of ♞f4.

11...axb5

Black can afford his liberties with his development because the centre is still fairly blocked. For this reason 11...♛xe5 looks suicidal after 12 0-0-0 followed by ♛d2 and moving the bishop from e3 to make way for ♜e1+ etc. The game move is positionally well-motivated as it 'develops' the rook on a8 by giving it an open file and strengthens the c4 centre point.

12 0-0-0

White's rapid mobilisation of his pieces makes a startling contrast to Black's kingside pieces whose one contribution to the game so far has been the edifying manoeuvre 1...♞f6 and 8...♞g8. Of course Black can claim that White has made a fundamental error: he has put his king into the lion's mouth by castling queenside in the Benko. Still all this will mean nothing if

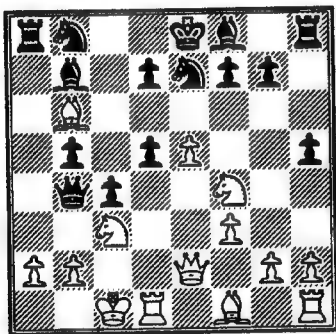White is allowed to crash through in the centre with 13 ♘f4 and 14 ♘fxd5.

12...♛b4!

The queen runs to the queenside so that d5 can be bolstered by putting the knight on e7. She also has an ingenious idea in mind.

13 ♘f4 ♞e7 14 ♗b6!

White sets up his next move by controlling the d8 square with his bishop.

14... h5!

Unable to develop his rook by normal means Khalifman prepares to swing it into the game via h6.
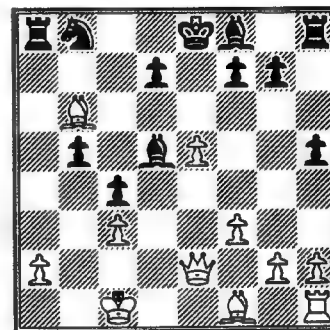
15 ♖xd5!

White's attack has reached its apex. There is the terrible threat of 16 ♖xb5 trapping the black queen, and the black king is in for a brutal time if the exchange offer is accepted:

15...♞xd5 16 ♘fxd5 ♗xd5 17 ♘xd5 ♛a4 18 ♘c7+ ♚e7 (he can't afford to walk into a discovered check on d8) 19 ♛d2!

with the double threat of a check on d6 or g5 will win. For example 19...♖h6 20 ♛g5+ f6 21 exf6+ ♖xf6 22 ♛e5+ ♚f7 23 ♛xh5+ ♚g8 24 ♛d5+ ♚h8 and here 25 ♘xa8 should win, but simplest is 25 ♛xa8 ♖xb6 26 ♛xa4 bxa4 27 ♘d5 and White is a pawn up in the endgame. However, there was a game changing surprise:

15...♛xc3+!! 16 bxc3 ♞xd5 17 ♘xd5 ♗xd5

The queen sacrifice has come to Black's rescue. Materially speaking he only acquires a rook and a knight but he has broken White's attack and gained a strong initiative against the white king. Perhaps an unexcitable computer or a well prepared player – that is to say a player who has checked things over with an unexcitable computer – could have beaten off the attack, but the practical difficulties proved too much even for a strong Grandmaster like Bodgan Lalic. It is a psychologically tough task to switch from attacking to defending.

18 ♛d2 ♗e6 19 ♗e2 ♞c6 20 f4 b4!

Naturally a Benko Gambit player isn't going to miss the chance to open up lines when his opponent's king is on c1.

21 f5 bxc3 22 ♛xc3 ♖a3 23 ♛b2 c3 24 ♛b5 ♗xf5 25 ♖f1 ♖xa2!

The concluding combination. Khalifman has worked out that he ▪▪▪ win the game without any help from the rook on h8.
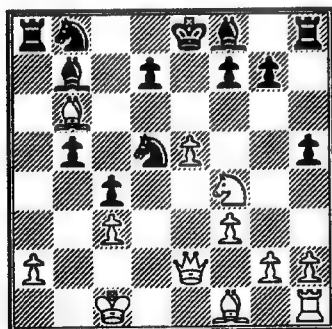
26 ♖xf5 ♘b4 27 ♕a5

He must stop the mate threat on a1.

27...g6! 0-1

An elegant finishing touch. White's queen and rook are hanging, but the killer threat is 28...♗h6+ 29 ♔d1 c2+.

A spectacular result for Black, but theory never stands still in such a sharp variation. Let's look ▪▪ some of the more recent developments.

Here in **A.Allemann – R.Costantini**, Biel 2001, White came up with 17 ♕e4!?
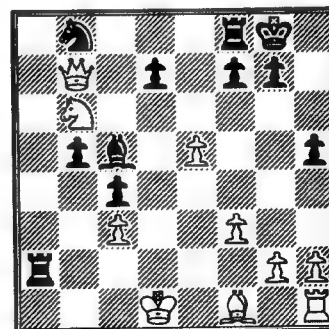
The queen pins the knight against the bishop, but is walking into a potential discovered attack. It is no wonder that Lalic wasn't prepared ▪▪ risk this against Khalifman without any pre-game research. One check from the knight on d5 would be enough to end the game. Nevertheless, if Black doesn't come up with

something convincing then he is just going ▪▪ drop more material. If 17...♘xf4 18 ♕xb7 is hopeless for Black, so he tried 17...♗a3+ 18 ♔d2. The only move not to fall for a queen winning knight check, but it will be very helpful for Black that his rook will be able to take on a2 with check. 18...♘xb6 19 ♕xb7 ♗c5 20 ♘d5! White can't afford to waste any time – it is essential to break the coordination of the black pieces or else Black will capture on a2 then castle with every chance to win.

20...♖xa2+ 21 ♔d1 0-0!

The only move. The game would end exactly as Black wishes after 21...♘xd5 22 ♕xb8+? ♔e7 23 ♕xh8 ♘xc3+ 24 ♔c1 ♗e3 or 24 ♔e1 ♗f2 mate, but White has the evil move 22 ♕c8+!! ♔e7 23 ♕xc5+ and he picks up the knight ▪▪ d5 ▪▪ well as if 23...♔e6 24 ♕d6+.

22 ♘xb6

A critical moment. The game continued very sharply

22...♖a1+ 23 ♔c2 ♗a3 24 f4 b4 25 ♘xc4 ♖c1+ 26 ♔d2 bxc3+ 27 ♔d3 ♗c5 28 g3 ♘c6 29 ♗g2

White's extra material must count now that he has got his kingside pieces out.

29...♘b4+ 30 ♕xb4!

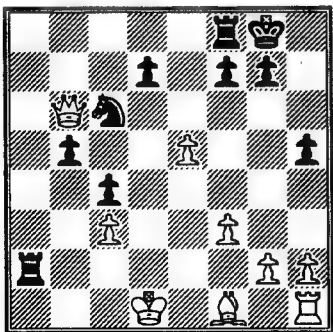White is quite happy to return the queen to be a piece up in the endgame. Black tried

30...♖xh1

but soon ran out of resources:

31 ♕xc5 ♖c1 32 ♕e3 ♖a1 33 ♔xc3 ♖c8 34 ♕d2 ♖a3+ 35 ♔d4 ♖a4 36 ♗d5 ♖b8 37 ♕c2 ♖a6 38 ♕f5 1-0

Black understandably felt obliged to do something active as he is a queen for a rook down. But returning to the diagram position above, one of the best features of the position for him is that the white king is trapped on the first rank. This means that Black need only play ♖b2 and get his king's rook to a1 for White to be mated – okay, I admit this is a very big 'only'! Another plus is that with the white king on the back rank White can't develop with ♗e2 without dropping the rook on h1.
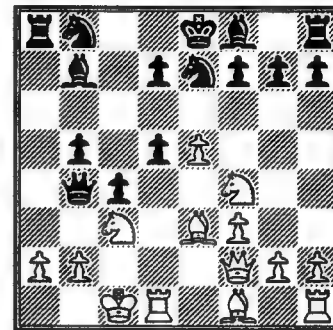
Therefore the calm **22...♗xb6 23 ♕xb6 ♘c6** looks best.

If 24 ♕xb5?? we get our back rank mate: 24...♖b8 25 ♕xc4 ♖b1. Or 24 ♗e2 ♖a1+ wins a rook. Meanwhile Black is

planning 24...♖fa8, 25...♖b2 and 26...♖a1 mate. Other ideas are 24...♖b8 followed by b5-b4 or even 24...b4 straightaway. And don't forget that ♘xe5 is possible. Therefore, despite White's huge material advantage, I think he is facing severe problems.

After his game with Khalifman, Lalic came to the conclusion that he should have played 14 ♕f2 (rather than 14 ♗b6).

He tried the new move against Alterman at Pula 1997. There followed

14....♘a6 15 ♔b1!

The idea is to trap the black queen after 16 a3! ♕b3 (16...♕a5 17 ♗b6) 17 ♘fe2! and 18 ♘c1. (Note that 18 ♘d4 also traps the queen, but it can be prevented by ♘f5 – it is 18 ♘c1 that is the killer threat.)

Alterman tried

15...♘f5 16 ♘fxd5 ♗xd5 17 ♘xd5 ♘xe3!

As usual Black had prepared to sacrifice his queen, but Lalic has learnt from bitter experience and declined the offer with

18 ♕xe3!

18 ♘xb4 ♘xd1 19 ♕d2 ♘xb4, when a2 ♖ hanging, looks great for Black.
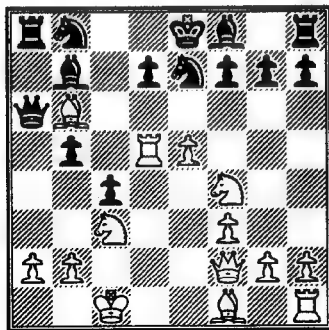
18...♕c5 19 ♕xc5 ♗xc5 20 ♘c3 ♘c7

and now Alterman gives 21 g3! planning 22 ♗h3 as a positional plus for White. I've looked at this in some detail and there is no escaping from the fact that Black has ■ weak pawn on d7 and a hole on d6, made all the worse as the white knight has the e4 square.

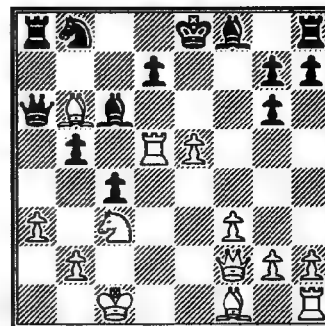Returning to the previous diagram instead of Alterman's 14...♘a6.

14...♕a5!?

has been recommended, in order to get the queen away from any traps and also out of the range of a knight should White play ♘xd5. On a positive note, 15...b4 is threatened. But can Black afford to spend another tempo moving his queen? In the game Lim Chuing Hoong – Wong Zi Jing, Penang 2000, White played ultra aggressively with

15 ♗b6 ♕▨▨ 16 ♖xd5!?

It turns out that the black queen hasn't escaped from the knight forks as after 16...♗xd5 17 ♘fxd5 ♘xd5 18 ♘xd5 the fork on c7 is decisive: 18...♕xa2 19 ♘c7+ ♔e7 (19...♔d8 20 ♘xa8+) 20 ♕c5+ ♔d8 21 ♘d5+ ♔e8 22 ♕c8 mate. In the game Black tried 16...♗c6 17 a3 ♘g6 18 ♘xg6 hxg6? but was massacred after 19 ♖xb5!! ♗xb5 20 ♘d5 ♕b7 21 ♘c7+ ♔d8 and now simplest was 22 ♘xa8+ ♔c8 23 ♗c5! for if 23...♕xa8 24 ♗xf8 ♖xf8 25 ♕c5+ picks up the rook on g8.

A spectacular win for White, but on the chesspublishing.com website Jon Tisdall points out that Black could have played 18...fxg6! making a hole on f7 for his king.

Theory needs to investigate lines such as 19 e▨ dxe6 20 ♖d8+ ♔f7 or 19 ♖xb5 ♗xb5 20 ♘d5 ♔f7! 21 ♘c7 ♕a4 22 ♘xb5 ♕xb5 23 ♕d4, but in the latter case having an extra rook certainly helps Black.

That concludes our look at the queen sacrifice variation. Black has tremendous practical chances as most players find it difficult to handle the defence in such situations; and objectively speaking it isn't even clear that White ■ doing OK.

The crunch variation in the Benko Mainline

Finally, we should look at what is regarded at the moment as White's most promising line against the Benko. It is to be found in the fianchetto variation beginning

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 ♘f3 ♗g7 8 g3 d6 9 ♗g2

It is a sign of the contrary nature of chess theory that putting the bishop on g2 used to be regarded as a limp way to meet the Benko – in effect the white bishop stood accused of running away from the challenge posed by the black bishop on a6. Now, however, the virtues of the fianchetto are fully appreciated. They can be summarised as follows:

First, compared to the **7 e4 ♗xf1** variation White gets to castle, which is self evidently a good thing.
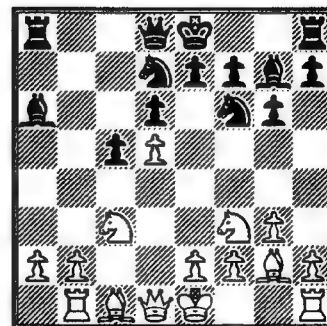
Second, the bishop on g2 deters Black from playing in the centre with e7-e6. And if Black does manage to achieve e7-e6 in a safe way, the white king is going to feel a whole lot better with a bishop guarding the light squares around him than he does in the castling by hand g2-g3 and ♔g2 variation. Furthermore, after e7-e6 and the exchange d5xe6; f7xe6 the white bishop sometimes pounces on the e6 weakling with ♗h3.

Thirdly – and this is the clincher – the white bishop is in a general sense a better piece on g2 than the black bishop is on a6. This might seem an astonishing claim, as the bishop on a6 controls far more squares than the bishop on g2. True; but the value of a piece depends foremost on how it relates to the other pieces. The bishop on g2 gets in no one's way and is reassuring to the white king; in contrast the black bishop obstructs his queen and rooks on the a- and b-files, while even if Black puts it on c4 it might take away a square that a black knight could have used to assail b2.

Incidentally, for this reason White must be very cautious about playing the pawn advance e2-e4 after he has played ♗g2. The pawn on e2 is restricting the black bishop, and in general should only advance when there is a quick e4-e5 in the offing (perhaps combined with f2-f4).

White has been achieving his success with one specific sequence of moves:

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 ♘f3 ♗g7 8 g3 d6 9 ♗g2 ♘bd7 10 ♖b1!

As explained in the strategy chapter, if 10 0-0 then Black has the chance to reply 10...♘b6! when 11 ♖b1? ♗c4 picks up either
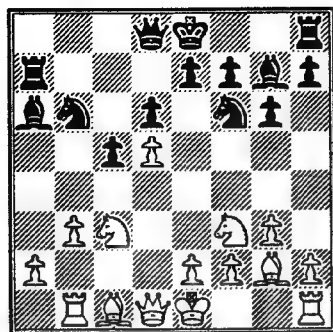
the a2 or d5 pawn with good play for Black. By playing the immediate 10 ♖b1 White removes this resource from Black, as 10...♘b6 can now be answered by 11 b3! stopping 11...♗c4. Thus White ensures he stays a pawn up. He intends to play very solidly and carefully to neutralise any Black counterplay. Having evacuated the rook from a1, the moves b2-b3, ♗b2 and a2-a4 are on his agenda, to deprive the black pieces of space and opportunities on the queenside.

J.Piket *White*
V.Topalov *Black*
Wijk aan Zee 1999

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 ♘f3 ♗g7 8 g3 d6 9 ♗g2 ♘bd7 10 ♖b1 0-0 11 0-0 ♘b6 12 b3 ♖a7

Topalov comes up with the plan of putting his queen on a8 where she both attacks d5 and adds to the pressure down the a-file.
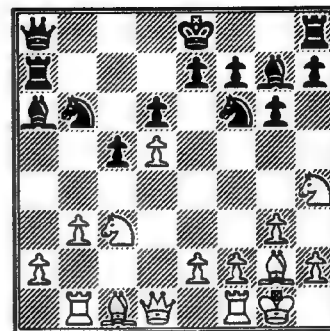
13 a4

Now the white pawns on a4 and b3 not only take away the c4 and b5 squares from the black minor pieces but as will be seen provide potential outposts on these squares for the white knights.

However, there was no need to present Black with a potential target on b3 or a loose pawn on a4 in the event of a c5-c4 counterthrust. A couple of years later Epishin refined White's opening strategy via a transposition with 13 ♖e1 ♕a8 14 ♘h4 ♖b8 15 ♗b2. Black could find no constructive plan and White achieved a quick breakthrough in the centre after 15...♘e8 16 ♗a1 ♘c7 17 e4 ♘d7 18 ♘f3 ♘b5 19 ♘xb5 ♖xb5 20 e5! etc. in V.Epishin – P.Schuurman, Creon 2002.

You can see from this extract that the secret of playing this variation well for White is to combine careful defensive moves (13 ♖e1! 16 ♗a1!) with overt aggression at the correct moment (20 e5!). Not many ordinary players can play in this style – they will lack the patience to make little, quiet moves or fail to seize the moment to switch to the attack. Therefore, although the theoretical assessment is in White's favour, this probably won't mean too much if you aren't playing a Grandmaster.
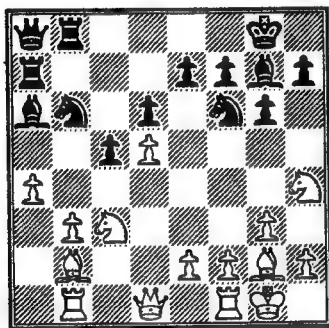
13...♕a8 14 ♘h4!

Uncovering a defence of d5 by the bishop on g2 looks somewhat strange, but it is an important feature of this variation. Because it is available White hasn't had to waste time arranging the defence of d5 with ♖e1 and e2-e4 – and has also avoided the loosening that e2-e4 entails.

14...♖b8 15 ♗b2

It is often difficult to find a suitable role for White's dark squared bishop in the Benko Mainline. Here there are no such problems: the bishop is able to contest the a1-h8 diagonal with its opposite number on g7. You only need recall that Black goes to the trouble of the move order 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6! to keep the white bishop out of b2 to appreciate that this is annoying for Black.
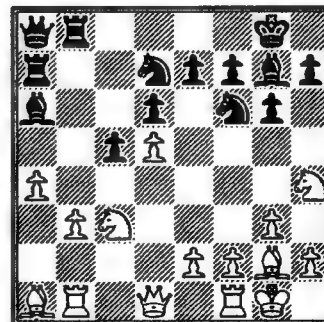

15...♘bd7

Nonetheless, White's strategy hasn't been entirely without drawbacks: the pawn on b3, which supports a4, guards c4 and blocks the b-file, can be targeted. The most direct way to do this was with 15...c4!? which can lead to flabbergasting complications. After 16 b4 White has connected passed pawns, but it will be no peaceful stroll up the board as 16...♗b7 leaves both a4 and d5 hanging. Now Grandmaster Igor Stohl in *ChessBase Magazine* gives the following hair raising variation: 17 a5 ♘bxd5 18 ♘b5 ♘e3! 19 ♕d4! (19 fxe3 ♗xg2 20 ♘xg2 ♖xb5 is useless) 19...♗xg2 20 ♕xa7 ♗xf1 21 ♕xa8 ♖xa8.

Here he assesses 22 fxe3 ♗xe2 23 ♘c7 ♖c8 as unclear, but in fact this just looks bad for White, e.g. 24 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 25 ♘d5 c3 26 ♘xf6+ exf6. With the knight offside on h4, the black pieces

are far better coordinated to help or hinder a passed pawn. Stohl also analyses 22 ♘c7 ♖a7 23 ♗d4 ♖xc7 24 b5 c3 25 b6 c2 26 ♖c1 but doesn't dare to give a definite verdict – White's passed pawns are fearsome but Black is two pieces up at the moment!

Although at first glance it looks insane for White to pass up the chance of creating passed pawns with 16 b4, I would suggest 16 ♘b5!? ♗xb5 17 axb5 as an interesting alternative that keeps some edge and avoids brain ache. It is logical in that it takes advantage of a drawback to 15...c4: namely it has weakened the d4 square. If Black does nothing active White can play ♘f3, ♘d4 and ♘c6 when his knight dominates the centre. Play could go 17...♖a5 18 ♘f3! ♖xb5 19 ♘d4 ♖xd5! The exchange sacrifice appears okay for Black but White can probe a little for the initiative rather than accept the offer immediately, for example with 20 ♗c3!?

16 ♗a1!

This simple move crushes Black's hopes of freeing his queenside pieces from the pawn bind as 16...c4? is useless after 17 b4.

16...♘e5 17 ♖c1 ♖ab7 18 ♖fd1 ♕a7

If 18...c4 19 bxc4 ♗xc4 20 ♖xb7 ♖xb7 21 ♘b5!? ♗xb5 22 axb5 ♖xb5?! 23 ♗xe5 dxe5 24 d6 is very dangerous for Black – Stohl.

19 ♗f1 ♘e8

Stohl criticises this retreat and suggests that Black can free himself with 19...c4 20 bxc4 ♗xc4 when the threat of 20...♗b3 gives Black plenty of play. It seems strange that Topalov would pass up such a chance to free his game. Sure enough, it is all an illusion as White can play much more strongly with 20 b4! when 20...♖xb4 falls for the interference move 21 ♘b5!

Therefore the chance for Black to play actively has gone and he has to defend for the rest of the game against the rising positional pressure.

20 ♘e4 ♖b6 21 ♘d2 ♘d7 22 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 23 ♘hf3 ♘ef6 24 e4 ♖b4 25 ♗xa6 ♕xa6 26 ♘c4

White can enjoy life as he has managed to exchange dark squared bishops and the c4 square is firmly in his hands. The rest of the game is cat and mouse until Piket finally decides to finish things off with a centre break through. Here are the remaining moves:

26...♘b6 27 ♘fd2 ♘fd7 28 ♘a3 ♘f6 29 ♕c3 ♘bd7 30 ♘c2 ♖4b7 31 ♘c4 ♔g8 32 f3 ♖a6 33 ♖b2 ♘b6 34 ♘2e3 ♘xc4 35 ♘xc4 ♖b4 36 e5! dxe5 37 ♕xe5 ♕b7 38 d6 ♖xf3 39 ♖f1 ♕e4 40 dxe7 ♕xe5 41 ♘xe5 ♖e4 42 ♖d2 ♖e8 43 ♘c4 ♖e6 44 ♖xf6! 1-0
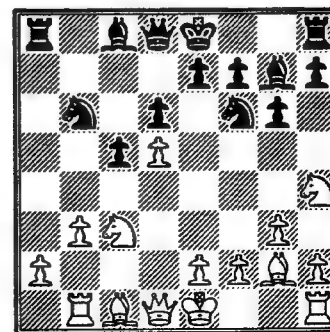
This was a polished positional display by the Dutch Grandmaster.

A.Barsov *White*
S.Mannion *Black*
Port Erin 2003

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 g3 d6 8 ♗g2 ♗g7 9 ♘f3 ♘bd7 10 ♖b1 ♘b6 11 b3 ♗c8

Black retreats his bishop, hoping with the positional threat of 12...♗f5 to provoke White into playing 12 e4 – whereupon the bishop will return to a6 again and suddenly enjoy an open diagonal where it prevents White from castling. This is an extreme example of the general rule that White should be very circumspect about advancing his e-pawn when he has fianchettoed on g2.

12 ♘h4!

Unlucky Black. White stops 12...♗f5 in the most efficient way and also adds to the defence of d5 by uncovering the bishop on g2. As will be seen next move, Barsov also has an aggressive idea in mind.
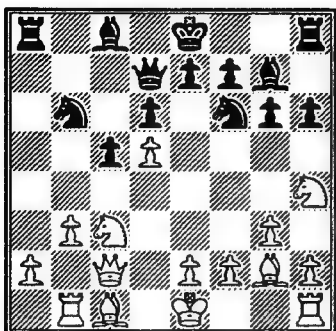
12...h6

The only plan available to Black is to persevere with the idea of ♗f5 by chasing the knight from h4 with 13...g5.

13 ♕c2!

Again thwarting ♗f5, as 13...g5? 14 ♘f5 would be horrible for Black.

13...♕d7

14 f4!

A strong opening novelty is often startling in its simplicity. White prevents 14...g5 and prepares to hammer through with the pawns on the kingside. Why didn't anyone think of this before?

The critical line up until here had been 14 ♗b2 g5 15 ♘f3 ♕f5! as usual in the Benko Black is unafraid of the exchange of queens – in fact he welcomes it as insurance against being mated. Here White would have difficulty holding onto the d5 pawn after 16 ♕xf5 ♗xf5. Instead,
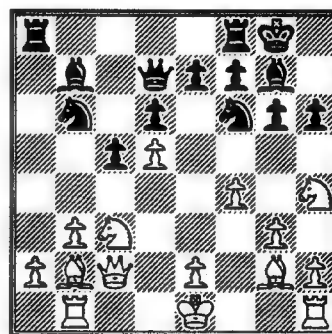
[a] 16 e4 ♕g6 17 0-0 0-0 18 ♕d2 ♘g4! Black clears the way for counterplay along the f file. At the same time he avoids being pulverised by e4-e5. 19 ♖fe1 f5 20 exf5 ♗xf5 21 ♖a1 ♖f7 22 h3 ♘f6 23 ♖e2 ♖af8 and Black managed to win by direct attack after some poor defending by White in M.Wunnink – E.Wiersma, Amsterdam 2002.

[b] However, in a later game Epishin came up with the sly improvement 16 ♕d1! which doesn't expose a pawn on e4 to be used as a hook for the f7-f5 pawn advance by Black. This makes it far harder for Black to generate counterplay along the

f file. 16...0-0 17 0-0 ♕g6. Black can't capture on d5 as if 17...♘bxd5 18 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 19 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 20 e4! ♕xe4 21 ♘xg5 or 17...♘fxd5 18 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 19 ♘d4 would leave Black contemplating desperate queen sacrifices. White's queenside play came up trumps in the game after 18 a4 ♗f5 19 ♖c1 ♕h5 20 ♖e1 ♘h7 21 ♗a1 ♗h3 22 ♗h1 f5 23 ♘b5 ♗xa1 24 ♖xa1 f4 25 a5 etc. in V.Epishin – R.Piantoni, Bratto 2002.

14...♗b7 15 ♗b2 0-0

Here 15...♘bxd5? drops a piece to 16 ♘xd5, but now the d5 pawn must be defended again.

16 ♕d2!

As always White is keen to avoid 16 e4? which would open up all the squares in his centre – Black's best reply would be 16...♗a6 to prevent White from castling.

16...♘e8?

An unfortunate plan that removes the knight from the defence of the king. Perhaps Black should have risked everything on a counter attack with 16...e6 17 dxe6 fxe6 18 ♗xb7 ♕xb7 19 0-0 ♘g4. He has loose pawns all over the place, but perhaps the Goddess of dynamism will favour him.

17 0-0 ♘c7 18 f5 g5

19 f6!

A decisive breakthrough.

19...exf6 20 ♘f5 ♘e8 21 h4 ♕d8 22 ♘e4

Now Black has the worst bishop in the history of the Benko Gambit.

22...♘xd5 23 hxg5 ♕a5 24 gxh6 ♗h8 25 h7+ ♔xh7 26 ♕h6+ ♔g8 27 ♘g5 1-0

These two games give us a good idea of the dangers Black faces in this variation.
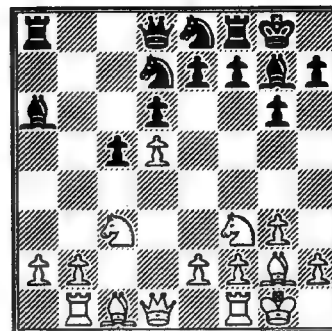
M.Drasko *White*
D.Pikula *Black*
Novi Sad 2000

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 g3 ♗g7 8 ♗g2 d6 9 ♘f3 ♘bd7 10 ♖b1 0-0 11 0-0 ♘e8

Black immediately mobilises his knight for queenside action and by uncovering an attack on c3 prevents 12 b3 in the most direct manner possible.
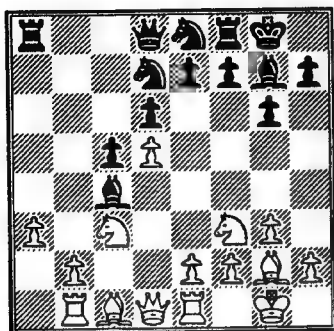

12 ♖e1

There is an alternative method of development: 12 ♕c2 ♘c7 13 ♖d1 ♘b6 14 e4, but by putting the rook on d1 White has in effect renounced playing for a centre breakthrough with e4-e5. This makes things easier for Black, for example 14...♘b5 15 ♘xb5 ♗xb5 16 b3 ♕c8 17 ♗g5 ♖e8 and Black had a pleasantly active position in P.Tregubov – T.Gharamian, Clichy 2004. White now played 18 a4?! but this allowed Black to break out with 18...♘xa4! 19 bxa4 ♗xa4 20 ♕c4 ♗xd1 21 ♖xd1 ♕a6! the endgame holds no fears for Black 22 ♕xa6 ♖xa6 23 ♗f1 ♖a1 24 ♖xa1 etc. Without the help of queens or rooks the white minor pieces can't put significant pressure on any point in the black pawn structure.

12...♗c4

An active move but it has the downside that the bishop takes away the c4 square from the knight.

13 a3!

Now the question is whether Black can get enough counterplay by exploiting the hole on b3.

13...♘c7 14 e4 ♖b8 15 ♗f4 ♖b6

Black wants to double rooks against b2. Instead, 15...♖b7 would keep open the b6 square for the knight, but it would leave d6 vulnerable and Black would risk being gunned down by e4-e5, with a sudden attack on the rook on b7.

16 ♗h3 ♗b3

The bishop gets in the way of an attack on b2 and is a target on b3; but on the other hand it is a nuisance for White, not least because it restrains White in the centre – 17 e5 would drop the d5 pawn.

17 ♕c1 ♘f6 18 ♗h6

The exchange of dark squared bishops weakens the black king's defences and removes Black's dynamic ideas along the dark square diagonal. Hence it is a fine preparatory move before White loosens himself with f2-f4 and e4-e5.
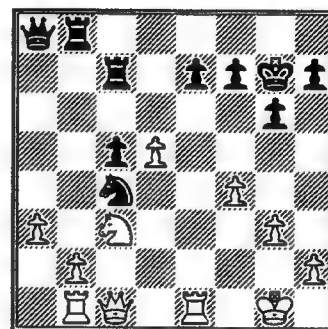
18...♕a8 19 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 20 ♘d2 ♖fb8 21 ♗f1!

Stopping 21...♘b5.

13...♘d7 22 f4 ♖6b7 23 ♘xb3

White has run out of useful preparatory moves and so makes his bid to break through in the centre.

23...♖xb3 24 ♗c4 ♖3b7 25 e5! ♘b6 26 exd6 ♘xc4 27 dxc7 ♖xc7

28 ♘b5

The exchange of knights helps Black. With the black queen so far away from the kingside direct attacking play with 28 f5!? looks dangerous, for example 28...♖cb7 29 fxg6 hxg6 30 ♕f4 or even 29 f6+!? exf6 30 ♘e4 ♘e5 31 ♕f4.

28...♖xb5 29 ♕xc4 ♖cb7 30 ♖e2 ♔g8 31 a4 ♖b4 32 ♕xc5 ♕xa4

Now Black has enough counterplay in view of White's open king. The remaining moves were

33 ♕c8+ ♔g7 34 ♕c3+ f6 35 ♖be1 ♕a7+ 36 ♔g2 ♖4b5 37 ♖d2 ♖d7 38 ♕c6 ♖c5 39 ♕e6 ♕b7 40 ♖ed1 ♖b5 41 ♔h3 ♖d6 42 ♕e2 ♔f8 43 ♕c4 ½-½
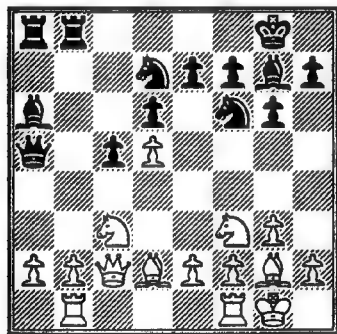
V.Kramnik *White*
L.Van Wely *Black*
Amber Blindfold Monte Carlo 2003

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 g3 d6 8 ♗g2 ♘bd7 9 ♘f3 ♗g7 10 ♖b1 0-0 11 0-0 ♕a5

The queen move allows the rook on f8 to go to b8, and prevents White from developing with b2-b3 and ♗b2.

12 ♗d2 ♖fb8 13 ♕c2

13...♘g4

The alternative 13...♘e8 was played in Kramnik – Topalov – see the Tricks and Traps chapter.

Perhaps the best idea is the simple queen retreat 13...♕d8. This gets the queen out of the way so that Black can play the manoeuvre ♘b6 and ♘c4 without worrying about her becoming trapped, or at least a victim of a discovered attack by the bishop on d2. Play could go 14 ♖fd1 ♘b6 15 e4 ♘c4 16 ♗c1 ♕a5 the queen bounces back to a5 now that the white bishop has left d2. 17 b3 ♘g4 18 ♘a4 ♗b5 and Black had plenty of counterplay in V.Malakhatko – A.Rakhmangulov, Alushta 2001. However, White doesn't have to be so obliging in letting the

black knight get to c4 – 14 b3 ♘b6 15 ♘h4 would keep White's typical edge in this line.

Instead Van Wely hopes to free his game with a piece exchange, but Kramnik was able to use the black knight that appears on e5 as a target for his centre pawn advances:

14 a4 ♘ge5 15 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 16 b3

You should be familiar with this pawn routine by now. No doubt Kramnik could play it with his eyes closed, as was indeed the case here as it was a Blindfold game!
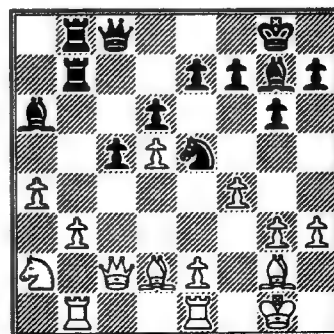
16...♕d8 17 ♖fe1 ♖a7 18 h3 ♖ab7

Now Black is ready to generate counterplay with 19...c4.

19 ♘a2!

...which Kramnik prevents with this retreat, preparing to answer 19...c4 with 20 b4.
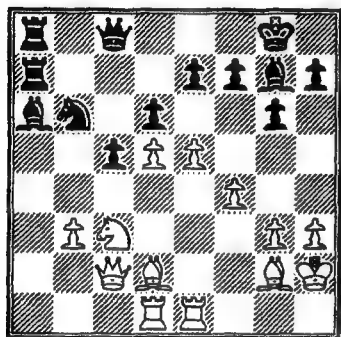
19...♕c8 20 f4

Having blocked Black's counterplay, Kramnik begins to assert himself in the centre.

20...♘d7 21 ♔h2 ♘b6 22 e4 ♘xa4! 23 e5!

If instead 23 bxa4 ♖b2 24 ♖xb2 ♖xb2 regains the piece with advantage. Unfortunately for the Dutch Grandmaster, White can just plough right ahead in the centre.

23...♘b6 24 ♘c3 ♖a7 25 ♖bd1 ♖ba8

White has an optimum centre build up and can break through before Black can land a counterblow on the a-file.

26 ♘e4 ♗b7

White would have dangerous threats after 26...dxe5 27 d6.

27 exd6 ♗xd5 28 dxe7 ♖xe7 29 ♕xc5

Kramnik cashes in on his central pressure by entering an endgame a pawn up. He won after

29...♕xc5 30 ♘xc5 ♖xe1 31 ♗xe1 ♗xg2 32 ♔xg2 h5 33 ♗f2 ♖a2 34 ♔f3 ♖c2 35 ♖d8+ ♗f8 36 ♘d3 ♖c6 37 b4 ♔g7 38 b5 ♖e6 39 ♗d4+ f6 40 f5! 1-0

If 40...gxf5 41 ♘f4.

When facing the fianchetto variation Black must be prepared to wait patiently and take his chances. Sooner or later White is going to have to commit himself to pawn advances in the centre or on the queenside, and if Black has kept his pieces well coordinated he will be ready to take advantage of the open lines.

The fianchetto variation doesn't win by force for White, but at the highest echelons of chess it has been scoring well. This is because players of that level know how to play perfect defensive chess as White for 20 or so moves (the word 'grovel' flashed through my mind for some reason) and then suddenly switch to scintillating attacking play. Very few players can copy this style of play without going wrong at some point – they will either get the balance of attacking and defensive moves wrong, or lose control by making tactical oversights or strategical errors. Therefore, unless you are playing Kramnik tomorrow at Linares you don't have to be afraid of the fianchetto variation.

Benko Tricks and Traps

You will find many tactical combinations scattered throughout this book. Indeed almost every Benko triumph for Black seems to be rubber-stamped with ♖xb2! as the culmination of a successful queenside strategy. In the puzzle chapter you will get the chance to sharpen your tactical vision in the Benko – and I hope I'm not giving the game away if I reveal that, yes, that old war-horse ♖xb2 will be found galloping around in there. In the present chapter I want to think about what can be described as strategical or even psychological traps.

In the early days White seemed to feel it was somehow his duty to punish Black for giving up the pawn. This took two distinct forms: either he would rush into an unsupported central advance with moves like f2-f4 and e4-e5; or he would go into an endgame convinced he was better, making rash pawn moves on the queenside and amazingly tortuous manoeuvres with his pieces. In either case, playing through early Benko games gives a distinct impression of watching lemmings jumping off a cliff.

In effect, White was trapped by his false evaluation of the gambit. After Black's crushing score with the Benko at Skopje in 1973 he began to treat it more respectfully and it ceased to be a guaranteed way for a Grandmaster to pay the rent.

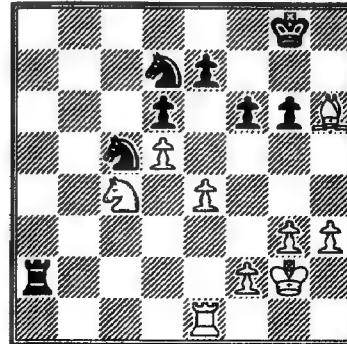Even so, White still finds it hard to accept that the endgame can be dangerous for him.

Trap One

Underestimating the danger of the Benko Endgame

D.Gurevich *White*
L.Alburt *Black*
Hastings 1983

White still has an extra pawn. All the pawns are on the same side of the board and Black has no passed pawn. White even has the next move. It is easy to concede that the active black rook gives Black enough for the pawn, but winning chances?! It seems far fetched, but let's look at what happened:

28 h4?

This will stop the bishop being trapped with g6-g5 – or so White thinks. An example of the danger White faces is that if 28 ♗c1 ♘d3 29 ♖f1 ♖c2 wins a piece.

Here Alburt says that White should bail out with 28 ♗e3, allowing 28...♘xe4 when Black has some advantage. Of course it would be difficult for White to hand back the pawn and admit he was slightly worse. He is trapped by the belief that he only has to be careful and the extra pawn will see him through.

28...♘d3! 29 ♖f1 ♘7c5

The black knights have come to life, tying down the white rook and confronting White with a problem typical of the Benko endgame: how to defend the e4 pawn?

30 ♘d2 g5! 31 ♖d1 ♘a4!

Now White can only shield the base of his pawn chain on f2 by giving up a piece.
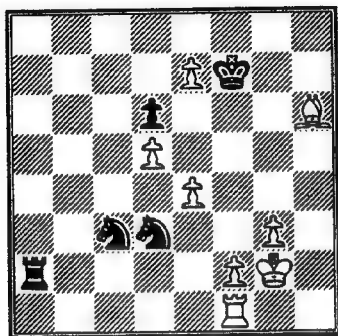
32 hxg5 ♘c3

The coordination between the white pieces has been ruined by the highly dexterous black pieces.

32 hxg5 ♘c3 33 ♖f1 ♖xd2 34 gxf6 ♖a2!

This prevents White ever activating his rook with ♖a1.

35 fxe7 ♔f7

At the moment White has as many as four pawns for the piece, but the problem pawn on e4 is indefensible. The nimble black knights eventually allowed Black to pick off more pawns, and he ground out a win in a long endgame after 36 ♗e3 ♘xe4 37 ♖d1 ♘e5.

Trap two

Being provoked into over-active play

These days the strongest players have learnt as White the importance of patience. They defend carefully and await their chances. In effect, like a martial arts expert, they use the power of Black against himself: 'You want to attack me? Go ahead, but it will be on my terms'.

In the following game we see World Champion Vladimir Kramnik in the role of a shrewd psychologist. He is playing Veselin Topalov, one of the most aggressive players of the modern chess world. Rather than attack from the outset Kramnik quietly strengthens his game and waits for the Bulgarian Grandmaster to play a loosening move. Topalov is defeated solely because he tries to 'make it interesting' – in other words he is trapped by his desire to play a fighting game.

V.Kramnik White
V.Topalov Black
Wijk aan Zee 2003

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 g3 d6 8 ♗g2 ♘bd7 9 ♘f3 ♗g7 10 ♖b1 0-0 11 0-0 ♕a5 12 ♗d2 ♖fb8 13 ♕c2 ♘e8 14 ♖fe1 ♘c7

White's next two moves are characteristic of this variation. He isn't going to rush into direct action.
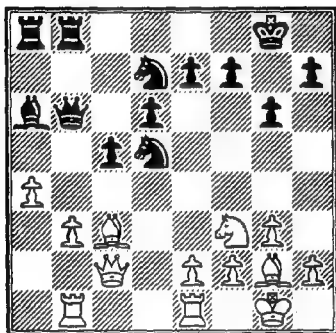
15 a4! ♕b4 16 b3

There is something about the trench warfare aspect of this type of strategy that seems to upset Benko players. Topalov is straining at the leash and sees the chance to 'make it interesting' with

16...♗xc3?

...which gives up his star piece in order to conquer d5.
In principle this is ■ valid idea, but in this specific instance it can be refuted tactically by White's 18 move. He should continue to wait.

17 ♗xc3 ♘xd5

18 ♘e5!

When he gave up his bishop, Topalov wasn't afraid of being mated along the dark diagonal, or at least he was prepared to take the risk for the sake of counterplay; but Kramnik finds a way to return the bishop pair in order to demolish Black's centre and force him into an ugly endgame.

18...♘xe5 19 ♗xd5 ♗b7 20 ♗xb7 ♖xb7 21 ♗xe5 dxe5 22 ♖ec1

If you put the black pawn on e5 back on d6 you will that Black has ■ fine position. But as things stand the c5 pawn is a serious weakness. Topalov was unable to hold the endgame against Kramnik's relentless positional play after 22...f6 23 ♕e4! (but not 23 ♕xc5 as a4 will drop after the exchange on c5) 23...♔g7 24 ♖c3 ♖ab8 25 ♕c2 ♕e6 26 a5 ♔f7 27 ♖a1 ♖xb3 28 ♖xb3 ♕xb3 29 ♕xc5 ♕b2 30 ♕c4+ ♔g7 31 ♕a2 ♕xa2 32 ♖xa2 etc.
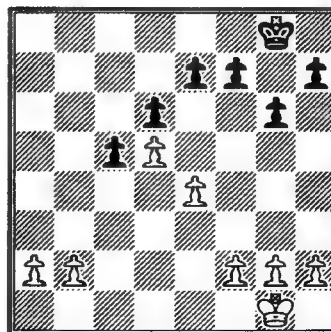
Despite this defeat, we should applaud Topalov for his spirit of enterprise. He was willing to avoid routine, stereotyped thinking in the pursuit of counterplay, which is a quality which has made him one of the best players in the world. Occasionally he may fail – and how many players succeed against Kramnik with Black? – but he will also win a lot of games.

Trap Three

A solid pawn structure leads to complacency

With his active style of play Topalov avoids a serious psychological weakness, which costs Black countless games in the Benko; that is, being unwilling to compromise the solidity of the pawn structure or make any other concession for the sake of counterplay. This aversion to messing things up with pawn breaks such as e7-e6 is perfectly understandable.

After all, the first thing we learn when we study the Benko ■ that Black's model strategy is based on keeping a solid chain of pawns on the dark squares and utilising the open ■ and b files for counterplay.

Such a strategy I would call a 'pawn structure' strategy: the emphasis is counterattacking from a solid pawn base. In an archetypal Benko middlegame after 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 ■ d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 Black doesn't seek activity

in the centre, and is often dismayed if White breaks things up there with e4-e5. Certainly Black considers playing pawn moves such as c5-c4 and e7-e6 or f7-f5, but only in the right circumstances, normally after the black pieces have been deployed on the queenside and the initiative has been gained. With two open files on the queenside, Black doesn't want or need things to get messy in the centre. He is happy with the status quo there.
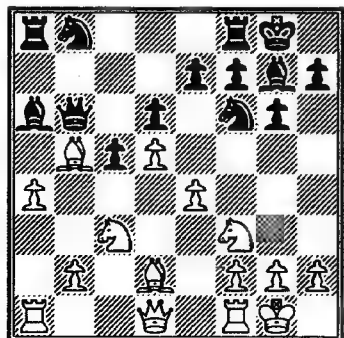
So far so good. Everything is on the whole fine if White plays 5 bxa6 and follows standard lines. But – and this is the positional trap we are talking about – such a strategy can be catastrophic in other, almost identical circumstances.

B.Gulko White
R.Vaganian Black
Riga 1995

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 ♘f3 d6?!

More active are 4...g6 or 4...♗b7 – the game move commits Black to a mainline 4 cxb5 a6 type set up but with fewer chances of counterplay.

5 cxb5 a6 6 e3 g6 7 ♘c3 ♗g7 8 a4 0-0 9 e4 axb5 10 ♗xb5 ♗a6 11 ♗d2 ♕b6 12 0-0
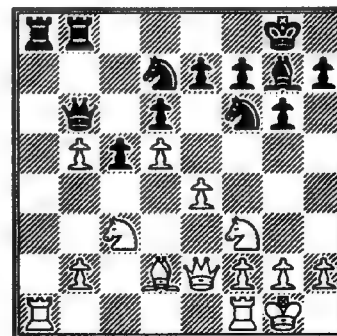
Black has played all the standard Benko moves: a kingside fianchetto and d7-d6, ♗a6 and ♕b6. But now what? Vaganian couldn't find anything better than

12...♗xb5 13 axb5

but the exchange of bishops has come under far less favourable circumstances than normal: White hasn't been prevented from castling and the pawn on b5 blocks any counterplay against b2. Nor does Black have undisputed control of the a-file with a pawn on a2 in his sights. If Black could somehow arrange the manoeuvre ♘e8-Nc7 and ♘xb5 he would have the last laugh, but it proves unfeasible. The game continued

13...♘bd7 14 ♕e2 ♖fb8

Black's pieces are all dressed up but with nowhere to go on the queenside. Therefore Gulko decides it is the moment to crack open the centre:

15 e5!

Usually before playing such a move White would be feverishly calculating possible refuting combinations by Black aimed at b2 or c3, especially when facing a maverick tactical player like Vaganian. But here the pawn on b5 is doing such a tremendous

job in quietening things along the b file that White has nothing to fear.

15...dxe5 16 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 17 ♕xe5 ♕b7 18 ♖xa8 ♖xa8 19 ♖e1 ♖e8 20 d6!

A solid passed pawn up and pressure along the e-file, what more could White ask for? Well, in fact Gulko wants to inflict another structural weakness on Black and gets his wish as 20...exd6 21 ♕xe8+ ♘xe8 22 ♖xe8+ ♗f8 23 ♗h6 mates.

21 ♕xc5 ♖c8 22 ♕b4 exd6 23 ♗f4 d5 24 b6

Black has avoided losing more material but the b pawn is unstoppable.

24...♖e8 25 ♖xe8+ ♕xe8 26 ♔f1 d4 27 b7 1-0

The danger of ending up in a solid but prospectless position is especially great when White declines the second pawn with 5 b6, 5 f3 or 5 e3. If Black reacts passively, just setting up a pretty pawn structure as above, he will more often than not find he is suffering from lack of piece play.

A.Shabalov White
J.Fedorowicz Black
Seattle 2003

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 b6 ♕xb6

5...e6 is more aggressive.

6 ♘c3 g6 7 e4 d6 8 ♘f3 ♗g7 9 ♘d2 0-0 10 ♗e2 a5!

Black should wait until White plays a2-a4 before committing himself to this loosening advance, e.g. 10...♘bd7 11 0-0 ♕c7 12 a4 ♖b8 when Black has counterplay on the b file, perhaps with ♖b4 at some point.
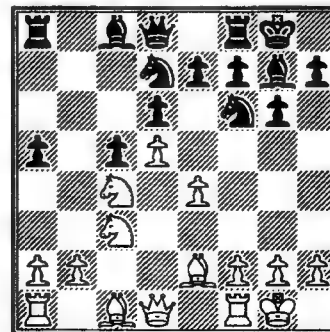
11 ♘c4 ♕d8

The queen is worse placed here than on c7 where it helps to restrain e4-e5. Evidently Black was afraid of the response ♘b5 at some point, which is another black mark against his 10th move.

12 0-0 ♘bd7

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with Black's position: he has developed his pieces, castled his king into safety, has a nice and sound pawn structure and isn't even a pawn down. But what can he do?

Imagine if the a5 pawn fell off the board. Then not only would the rook have the open file to attack a2 but a strategical plan appears for Black: ♘b6, ♗d7 and then ♘a4, challenging the white knight on c3. Alas, with the pawn on a5 putting the knight on a4 would just drop a piece.
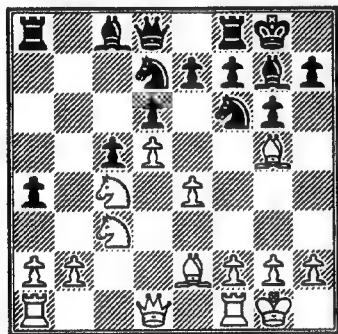

Seeing that Black can do nothing constructive, Shabalov prepares the breakthrough e4-e5 under optimum conditions.

An important facet of strategy is preventing your opponent's pieces from functioning properly and so he played

13 ♗g5!

after which the indirect attack on e7 will interfere with the coordination of Black's pieces.

13...a4?!

Black would be ecstatic if he could swap off this pawn: 14 ♘xa4?? ♘xe4 when White can no longer attack with e4-e5. Nevertheless, although it is easy to sympathise with Black's wish to play actively, it was perhaps best to be satisfied with 13...♘b6 as the pawn on a4 eventually drops off in a highly unfavourable manner.

14 ♕c2!

The queen bolsters e4, defends b2 against future attack, keeps an eye on a4 and clears the way for ♖ae1 in support of e4-e5.
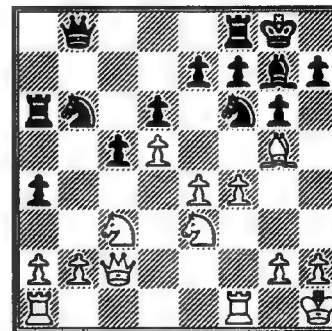
14...♘b6 15 ♘e3!

Declining to have anything to do with 15 ♘xb6 ♕xb6 16 ♘xa4,

when not only does Black have his beloved open files on the queenside, but also the exchange of knights has eased the congestion in his camp.

15...♗a6 16 ♗xa6 ♖xa6 17 f4

Black has failed to make any dent in White's queenside pawn structure. He therefore has no tactical counterchances to distract White from his central build up.

17...♕b8 18 ♔h1!

A wise precaution. In the Benko White always has to watch out for tactics after he has played the loosening move f2-f4, especially with his king on g1. Out of the blue a combination can strike him down: here for example it might be based on a future ♗d4 or ♕a7 followed by c5-c4. As Black is thrashing around on the queenside, with no obvious strategical plan in mind, White can afford this quiet move to cut out any danger.
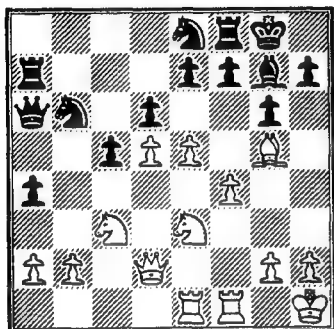
18...♖a7 19 ♖ae1 ♕b7 20 ♕d2

Shabalov completes his preparations for e4-e5 by defending the d5 pawn again: if immediately 20 e5? ♘fxd5 drops ⓐ pawn.

20...♕a6

Not only has Black failed to gain any queenside counterplay but he has also been unable to prevent e4-e5 either directly or indirectly.

21 e5 ♘e8

Now White has to be accurate as there is the positional threat of 22...f6! 23 exf6 exf6 24 ♗h4 f5! when the bishop on g7 comes alive and Black controls the e4 square.
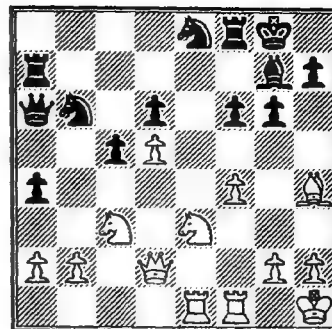
22 ♗h4!

White is in no hurry. Remember that strategy depends on preventing your opponent playing good moves – the original idea behind 13 ♗g5!

22...f6

This turns out badly but Black is short of good moves. The rook on f8 is shut in and if 22...♘c7? 23 ♗xe7, which means that in the long term Black has no way to resist White's pressure along the e file.

23 exf6 exf6

24 f5!

Preventing the freeing move 24...f5 – compare the note to 21...♘e8.

24...♘c4 25 ♘xc4 ♕xc4 26 ♗g3 ♖e7 27 ♖f4!

and not 27 ♖xe7?? ♕xf1 mate.

27...♖xe1+ 28 ♕xe1 ♕a6 29 ♖xa4 ♕b7 30 ♕e6+ ♔h8 31 b3 1-0

Black is only the Benko pawn down, but his pieces are ruinously passive and he can't hold onto the d6 pawn for long. Furthermore in view of the threat of 32 fxg6 hxg6?! 33 ♖h4+ his best move is 32...g5, but this is too ugly to contemplate.

In the Shabalov and Gulko games above we saw once again the strength of White's central breakthrough with e4-e5. Note that in both cases it was combined with action on the queenside – Gulko maintained a passed pawn, Shabalov created one as the culmination of his strategy.

Fedorowicz and Vaganian are highly formidable names in the history of the Benko Gambit. Why then did they lose in such dismal style? This may seem paradoxical, but they lost because they knew too much: they knew where all the pieces belonged

for Black in the mainline Benko and put them on these squares in *almost* identical variations. These lines are NOT the same as the Benko 5 bxa6 variation – you can't treat them in that style. Black's motto in the Benko should be 'Piece activity first, pawn structure second!'

Trap Four

Black believes the queenside belongs to him

It is very easy for Black to develop the prejudice that in the Benko the queenside is exclusively his territory. Such a way of thinking is perhaps permissable after 5 bxa6 as Black really does dominate the queenside: White takes a defensive attitude there and looks for his chances in the centre or on the kingside. However, in other situations this way of thinking can lead to disaster.

M.Gurevich *White*
A.Miles *Black*
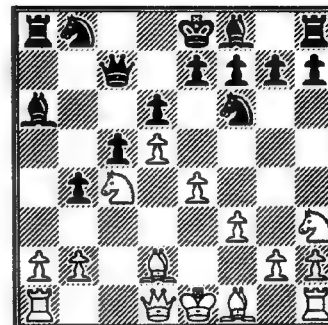Manila 1990

The opening moves were

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 axb5

In the previous chapter we recommend the active 5...e6 here, already planning a queen sacrifice...

6 e4 ♕a5+ 7 ♗d2 b4 8 ♘a3! ♗a6?

A serious mistake. Instead 8...d6 9 ♘c4 ♕a7 or 9...♕d8 are both playable for Black, if a little passive.

9 ♘c4 ♕c7 10 ♘h3 d6

Black has played in 'typical' Benko style: piece activity on the queenside including the normal move ♗a6; pawns have been placed on dark squares to form the standard type of centre; and on the kingside he is itching to play g7-g6 and ♗g7 to complete the archetypal Benko set up. And all this without having to give up a pawn! Surely Black is doing very well here?

In fact the word 'disaster' springs to mind. Sure enough, Black has played ♗a6 but the point of this move is supposed to be to free his game by exchanging light-squared bishops. With the trick 9 ♘a3! and 9 ♘c4 White has made 8...♗a6 look foolish: Black will be more or less compelled to play ♗xc4, but strategically speaking this is bad exchange for him as the white bishop pair will be very strong.

Gurevich cut through any assumptions Black might have had about controlling the queenside with
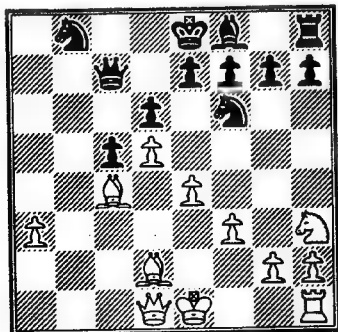
11 a3!

Now 12 axb4 is a threat, not only picking up a pawn but also putting the bishop on a6 in a pin and clearing the way for the bishop on d2 to join in the attack with ♗xb4. Besides this, Black has to worry about the consequences of a sudden ♕a4+. It is clear now that Black is way behind in development and will be

outgunned on the queenside: he can't keep things blocked long enough to mobilise his pieces. He can only buy off the direct attack by making the enormous positional concession...

11...♗xc4

which not only grants White the bishop pair but develops the bishop to c4 without any loss of time.

12 ♗xc4 bxa3 13 ♖xa3 ♖xa3 14 bxa3

This position is ■ perfect illustration of the inadequacy of reaching an assessment of a position based on static features such as pawn structure.

If everything else were equal then the pawn structure would favour Black – he has a protected passed ☐n c5 while the a3 is isolated. But everything isn't equal: the pawn on a3 has very powerful friends in the shape of the white bishop pair and ■ white rook. The a3 pawn is far from being a weakling.

14...g6 15 ♕a4+!

White forces off the queens so that ■ major obstacle to the advance of his passed pawn is removed.

15...♘bd7 16 ♕a8+ ♕b8 17 ♕xb8+ ♘xb8 18 ♔e2!

The king stays in the centre where if necessary it can help stop the advance of the c5 pawn – there was no reason at all to whisk it away to g1.

18...♗g7 19 ♖b1 0-0

In contrast the black king is unable to play an active role against the a3 pawn ☐☐ 19...♔d7 20 ♖b7+ would be gruesome.
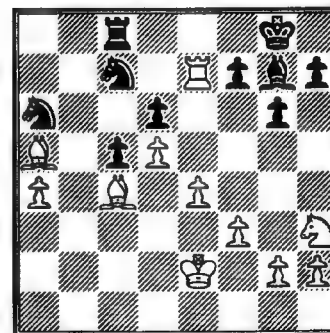
20 ♖b7

White's pieces now dominate the queenside. Already there is no direct way to defend e7 as if 20...♖e8 21 ♗b5.

20...♖c8 21 a4!

Not 21 ♖xe7? ♘bd7 enclosing the rook. But now the trapping mechanism has to be dismantled as Black can't let the a-pawn advance unimpeded.

21...♘e8 22 ♖xe7 ♘c7 23 ♗a5 ♘ba6

24 ♖d7! 1-0

Not only attacking d6 but also clearing the way for 25 ♘g5 attacking f7 (but not immediately 24 ♘g5?? ♗f6). This is too much to bear and so Black resigned.

Incidentally, this and the Gulko game above remind us that White's queenside pawns do sometimes come up trumps – Gurevich pawn was all-powerful on the a-file, Gulko's pawn queened on the b-file. Black has to keep in mind that White's pawns are a threat as well as a target. In particular if he gives the a-pawn too much freedom it might go rushing down the board before he can stop it.

Trap Five

Carrying out a routine plan that ignores tactics

It isn't enough to learn all the standard ideas given in the Strategy chapter and then play them come what may. In the following game Black employs all the normal Benko moves such as ♕b6, ♖fb8 and the knight manoeuvre ♘e8-c7-b5 – and it leads to disaster.

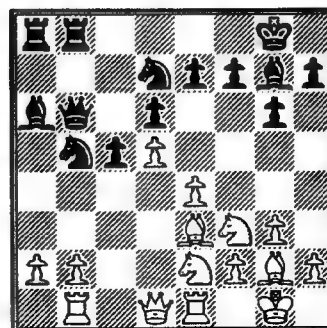**B.Avrukh** White
W.Hendriks Black
Wijk aan Zee 2000

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 g3 d6 8 ♗g2 ♗g7 9 ♘f3 ♘bd7 10 ♖b1 0-0 11 0-0 ♘e8 12 ♖e1 ♘c7

Black prepares ♘b5 to get rid of the white knight on c3. However 12...♗c4 was preferable, as given in the previous chapter. In contrast to Black's standard knight manoeuvre this would be a concrete reaction to the unique situation on the chess board: it is designed to provoke 13 a3 when a hole appears on b3.

13 e4 ♘b5 14 ♘e2 ♕b6

A natural square for the queen in the Benko mainline, but a glance should have been enough to see that here it is poorly placed opposite the rook on b1.

15 ♗e3! ♖fb8?

Black calmly continues his build up, even though it is apparent that b2-b4 will cause a lot of pain in view of the pin on the black queen. In some ways this is a bold and imaginative decision, since as long as Black doesn't get murdered by a b2-b4 pawn stab there is nothing that can hurt him. Unfortunately Grandmaster Avrukh sees through all the tactical traps.

16 a4!

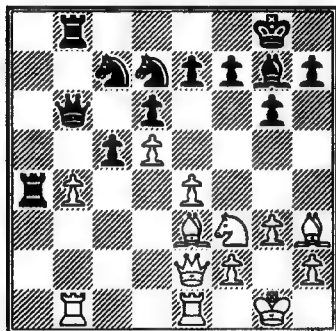If 16 b4? ♘a3 17 ♖b3?! ♗c4 wins material for Black.

16...♘c7 17 b4

With the threat of 18 b5, when the passed pawns crush Black.

17...♗xe2 18 ♕xe2 ♖xa4

Now it appears that the b4 pawn is going to drop off as if 19 bxa5 ♕xb1, but Avrukh can exploit some tactics to keep a clear plus.

19 ♗h3

19...♘e5? 20 ♘d2!

Adding a defender to b1 and so threatening 21 bxc5. At the same time 21 f4, trapping the knight, is on the cards. White won after

20...♖xb4 21 ♖xb4 ♕xb4 22 f4 c4 23 fxe5 ♗ 24 ♘c4 dxe5 25 ♕d3 etc.

If instead 19...♘f6 Avrukh gives the following variation leading to a clear advantage for White: 20 bxc5! ♕xb1 21 ♖xb1 ♖xb1+ 22 ♔g2 ♘xe4 23 ♗d4! ♖xd4 24 ♘xd4 ♘xc5 25 ♕xe7 ♘xd5 26 ♕e8+ ♗f8 27 ♘e6!

Trap Six

Copying a sharp idea without knowing the essential details

A common trap is to be impressed by ■ great win you see in print and decide to copy the victor's moves without being aware of all the subtleties behind his play.

M.Stojanovic White
B.Vuckovic Black
Valjevo 2000

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 ♟ ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 e4 ♗xf1 ♟ ♔xf1 d6 9 g3 ♗g7 10 ♔g2 0-0 11 ♘f3 ♘bd7 12 ♖e1 ♖a6 13 h3 ♕a8 14 ♗g5 h6 15 ♗d2 e6 16 dxe6 fxe6
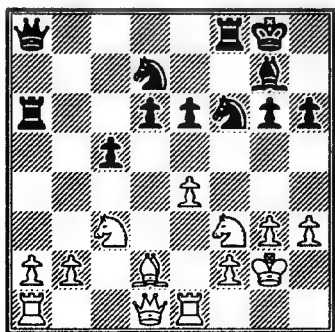

In this sharp position experience has taught us that against almost any sensible move Black has the excellent preventive reply 17...g5! stopping White playing ♘h4 or ♗f4.

Here is an example of the kind of attack Black can achieve after careless play by White.

17 ♕c2 g5! 18 ♘b5? (a useless decentralisation – 18 a4!? intending 19 ♖a3 was better) 18...♕b7 19 a4 d5! The second wave of Black's attack will break through to f3. 20 exd5 exd5 21 ♗c3 (if 21 ♖e7 ♘e4 intending ♖af6 looks very strong.) 21...d4 22 ♗d2 ♘d5 23 ♕e4 ♖af6! the rook sweeps across the board to strengthen the attack 24 ♖a3 ♘7b6 25 ♖e2 ♘c4 26 ♖d3 ♘de3+! A terrible tactical blow that wins a piece by force. 27 ♖exe3 ♘xe3+ 28 ♖xe3 ♕xe4 29 ♖xe4 ♖xf3 30 ♗f4 ♖b3 31 ♗d6 ♖f5 32 g4 ♖d5 0-1

Now imagine if you played through this game fast and, greatly admiring Black's plan of attack, you made a mental note to play

like this the next time you faced the Benko mainline. It is probable you would remember the basic mechanics of Black's attack such as ♕a8, the pawn breaks e7-e6 and d6-d5, and the striking rook manoeuvre ♖a6-f6. However, the 'trifling' pawn move 17...g5 is much less likely to stay in your long term memory, as it doesn't make as strong ▬ impression as the dynamic attacking moves. Therefore it could easily be omitted, when the game might go as follows:

17 ♔g1!? d5? 18 exd5 exd5 19 ♘h4!

Thanks to the absence of a pawn on g5, White can counterattack against the weak pawn on g6. Black was quickly trounced in the game P.Haba – L.Riemersma, Bundesliga 1996.

19...d4 20 ♕b3+ ♔h7 21 ♕c2! dxc3 22 ♕xg6+ ♔g8 23 ♗xc3 ♖f7 24 ♘f5 ♔f8 25 ♖ad1 ♘h5 26 ♖d6 ♖xd6 27 ♗xg7+ ♘xg7 28 ♕xd6+ ♔g8 29 ♘xh6+ 1-0
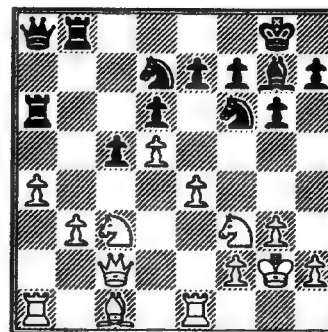
After 17 ♔g1 Black should play **17...g5!**. If White then tries to split up his pawns with 18 ♙5 then 18...♘d5! looks very strong – the threat is 19...♘xc3 winning ▬ piece ▬▬ f3 will be under double attack.

If you plan to play a sharp, double-edged opening you have to be aware of all the little details, including inconspicuous moves like 17...g5. In launching an attack on the centre with e7-e6 in the Benko Mainline you are playing for higher stakes than if you settled for queenside pressure. In a quiet position, things will probably not change much if you make a slight imprecision – say for example you put your queen on c7 when she would have been better on b6. There is no similar 'forgiveness' in a tactical fight after e7-e6.

In the same way, the plan of e7-e6 itself can be inappropriate in a given situation.

Z.Gyimesi *White*
V.Stamenkov *Black*
Nova Gorica 2004

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 e4 ♗xf1 8 ♔xf1 d6 9 g3 ♗g7 10 ♔g2 0-0 11 ♘f3 ♘bd7 12 ♖e1 ♖a6 13 ♕c2 ♕a8 14 a4 ♖b8 15 b3

Here rather than pursue ▬ policy of queenside pressure, Stamenkov decided to go for broke in the centre with...
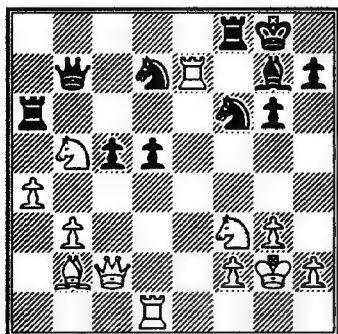
15...e6?!

As always this is an enterprising, interesting idea – but it simply doesn't work here.

16 dxe6 fxe6 17 ♗b2!

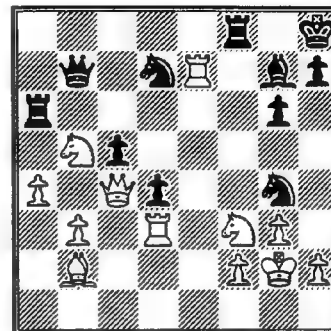The fact that the bishop can go directly to b2 will destroy Black's attack.

17...♖f8 18 ♘b5 ♕b7 19 ♖ad1 d5 20 exd5 exd5 21 ♖e7!

The position is very similar to that reached after 20 moves in the Stojanovic – Vuckovic encounter given above. In that game 21 ♖e7 would have failed to 21...♘e4 as the white bishop was on d2. Here with the white bishop on b2, 21...♘e4 would lose at once as g7 drops. As so often, a slight change in set up can make all the difference in a sharp position.

21...d4 22 ♕c4+ ♔h8 23 ♖d3 ♘g4

Now Black to move would win with 23...♘ge5, but as Benko hero David Bronstein once remarked, the most powerful weapon in chess is the right to move next!

24 ♖xg7!

The demise of the Benko bishop means that White's attack gets in first.

24...♔xg7 25 ♘bxd4 ♘de5

After 25...cxd4 26 ♕xd4+ a curious position arises in which Black can interpose either knight on e5 or f6 but White then captures the other one with his queen when he will emerge with at least three pawns for the exchange. For example if 26...♘gf6 27 ♕xd7+ or 26...♘df6 28 ♕xg4.

26 ♘e6+ ♔g8 27 ♗xe5 ♘xe5 28 ♘xc5+ ♘xc4 29 ♘xb7

The dust has cleared. White has three pawns and a knight for the rook, as well as two connected passed pawns. Now Black's pieces get into a further tangle and thanks to some nifty footwork by the white knights he drops more material.

29...♖b6 30 ♘c5 ♘b2 31 ♖d2 ♖c8 32 ♘e5!

This forces a decisive simplification as the knight on b2 is trapped.

32...♖xc5 33 ♘d7 ♖xb3 34 ♘xc5 ♖b8 35 ♖d7

And White won easily.

Test Positions

There are three main ways for Black to try to win in the Benko:

a) applying pressure along the b file, especially in the endgame
b) smashing up White's centre with e7-e6 or f7-f5
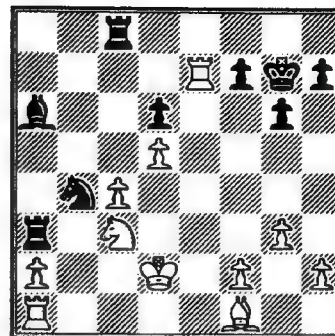c) letting White self destruct through overpressing in the centre.

Here are three winning attempts for White:

a) over-running the centre with e4-e5
b) exploiting the extra pawn to win an endgame
c) attacking the black king while potential defenders are busy on the queenside.

If White plays e4-e5 the verdict might either be that he is 'over-running the centre' or 'self-destructing by over-pressing in the centre', all because of a subtle strategical or tactical nuance hidden in the position. It's very easy to choose which description is appropriate with the advantage of hindsight, but it is very hard in a 'real' game!

Anyway here are some puzzles that give you a chance to test your understanding of the Benko. In some cases you have been asked 'what would you do if your opponent now played such-and-such a move?' This is a question you have to ask yourself during real games – tactical ideas have to be seen ahead, not just 'solved' once you arrive at the position. Of course, this also makes solving the puzzles a bit more difficult...Anyway have a go – and good luck!
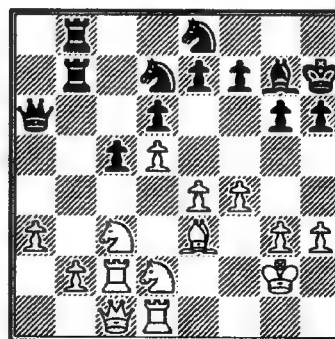
I.Stohl – K.Berg,
Tallinn 1986

Black to play

Is Black's pressure for his pawns decisive, strong, adequate or insufficient?
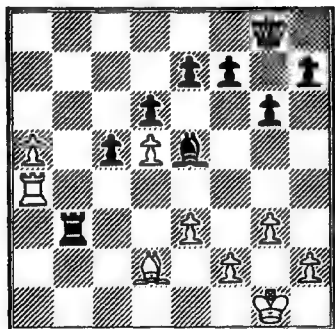
S.Holm – A.Toran Albero
Skopje 1972

Black to play

A game from the famous Benko massacre at the Skopje Olympiad. Here Black played **23...♛d3** attacking the bishop on e3, whereupon White replied **24 ♘db1**. Suggest a way for Black to continue his attack.
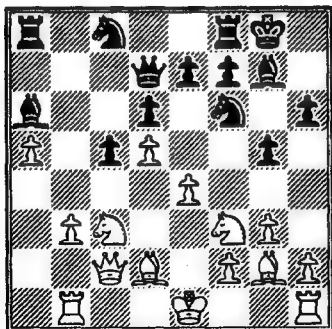
L.Lengyel – L.Kaufman
Los Angeles 1974

White to play

As I remark elsewhere, Black mustn't lose his sense of danger. In some cases White's passed a-pawn can become a monster if it breaks free from its shackles. Here is a startling example from a Benko game of the 1970s. How would you attempt to force the pawn through?

A.Aleksandrov – K.Van der Weide
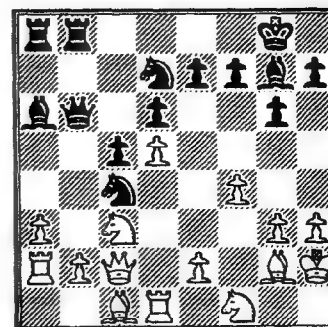Saint Vincent 2000

White to play

Which of these statements would you agree with or think is closer to the truth if White played 17 e5 here?

'White is opening lines in the centre with his own king trapped on e1 by the black bishop on a6 – it's bound to lead to disaster.'

'A great attacking move – Black's disorganised position is going to collapse on the kingside or in the centre, or both'.
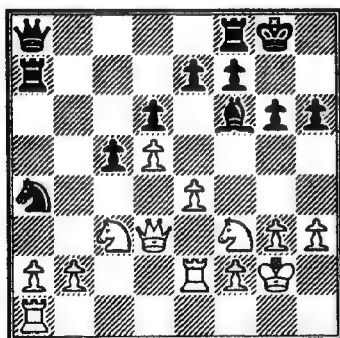
O.Averkin – L.Alburt
USSR 1974

Black to play

Another great example of Lev Alburt's skill in the Benko. How can Black increase the pressure on the queenside?
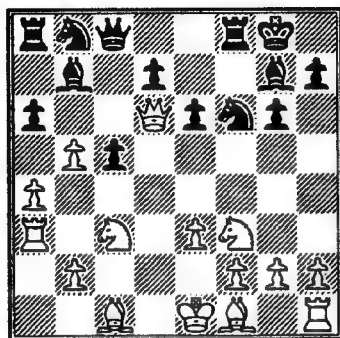
D.Rajkovic – J.Fedorowicz
Brussels 1987

White decided to break up Black's centre with **18 e5 dxe5 19 ♘xe5**. What was the best response?
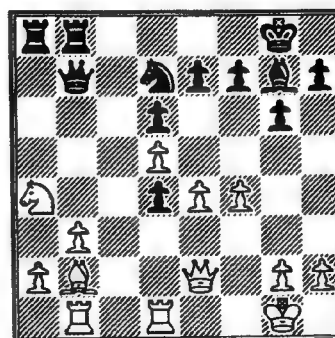
V.Danilov – C.Navrotescu
Baile Tusnad 2001

The diagram position was reached after the moves **1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗g7 7 ♖ 0-0 8 ♖a3 e6 9 ♘f3 ♗b7 10 dxe6 fxe6 11 ♕d6 ♕c8**. Here White came up with the idea **12 b4**, when after 12...cxb4 13 ♕xb4 he had removed his queen from a vulnerable square. What had he overlooked?
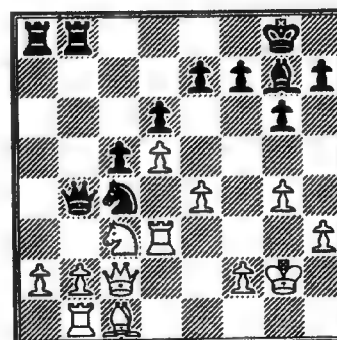
R.Almond – S.Palatnik
Hastings 1999

White played **20 ♗xd4**, after which he is two connected passed pawns up on the queenside. Therefore it is imperative for Black to find tactical resources to exploit his pressure along the a and b files. How can this be done? WARNING – before you reach such a position as Black you must have something concrete in mind – otherwise you might as well resign.

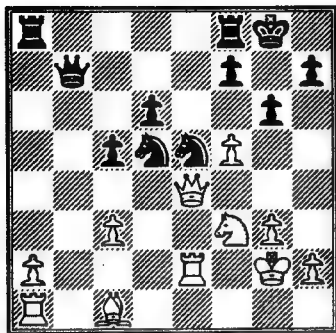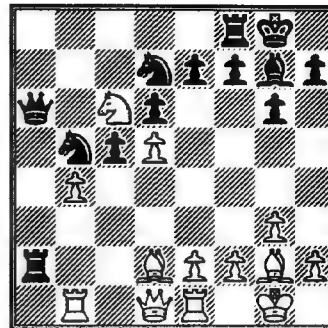### K.Aseev – A.Khalifman
St Petersburg 1995

How can Black exploit his pressure on the queenside?
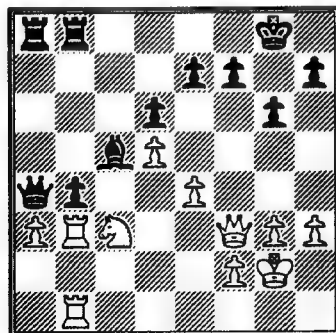
C.Hoi – J.Hodgson
Copenhagen 1985

White has just played 20 ♕e4. How would you carry on Black's attack?

A.Goldin – A.Fominyh
Elista 1995

White has just played 27 ♘c3. How should Black respond?

J.Rowson – B.Vuckovic
Gibraltar 2004

White has just played 19 ♘c6 attacking the e7 pawn. Should you defend it or is there something better?

P.Nikolic – V.Topalov
Linares 1997

Among modern Grandmasters the arch-Benko killer is the Bosnian Predrag Nikolic. He has a patient, positional style that seems to work wonders against Benko 'hotheads'. However in the diagram above Topalov has played with great energy and has achieved an impressive build up on the queenside. Here Nikolic decided to kick the black knight from g4 with ♖ h3 – where should it go?

Solutions

I.Stohl – K.Berg,
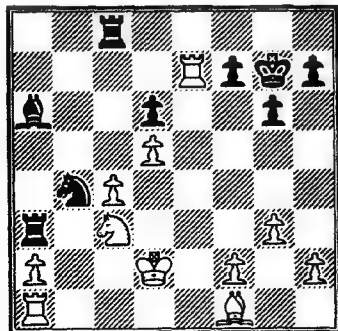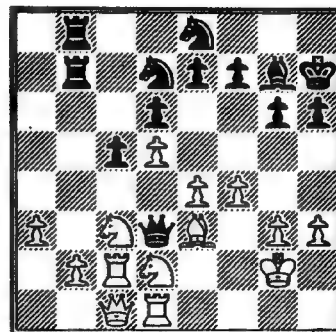Tallinn 1986

The pressure was decisive after **22...♖xc3!** when Black won a piece due to the fork after 23 ♔xc3 ♘xd5+. Instead 22...♗xc4 would be far inferior than the game move – White can reply 23 ♗h3 attacking the rook on c8 and intending 24 ♗e6 or simply 23 ♗xc4 ♖xc4 24 ♖e3. Black's pressure then looks little more than adequate.

Incidentally, White's last move before the diagram position had been 22 ♗g2-f1? So it is no real surprise he missed that disaster was going to strike on d5 – after all, the pawn had been defended three times. He was expecting trouble on the c4 square and completely overlooked Klaus Berg's neat tactic.

S.Holm – A.Toran Albero
Skopje 1972

The b2 square collapsed after **24 ♘db1? ♕xc2+! 25 ♕xc2 ♖xb2**, leaving White in desperate straits.

There followed **26 ♖d2 ♖xc2 27 ♖xc2 ♖b3 28 ♗c1 f5!** splitting up White's centre pawns. **29 exf5 gxf5.** Now the d5 pawn can be subjected to double attack by the black knights and is in the long term indefensible.
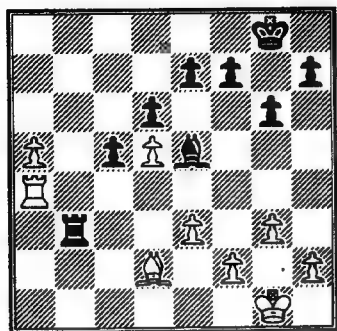
30 a4 ♘c7 31 a5 ♔g6 32 ♗d2 ♘b8 33 ♗e1 ♘ba6 34 ♖e2 ♔f7 35 g4 ♘b4 36 a6

White gives up the a-pawn just to stave off the loss of the d5 pawn a little longer.

36...♘bxa6 37 gxf5 ♘b4 38 ♖e3 ♗d4 39 ♖f3 ♖b2+ 40 ♔g3 ♘cxd5 41 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 and with the loss of the key pawn White gave up.

L.Lengyel – L.Kaufman
Los Angeles 1974

35 ♗b4!!

this prevents the black rook getting back to the first rank to head off the pawn.

35...cxb4

White also wins after 35...♖xb4 as he queens with check: 36 ♖xb4 cxb4 37 a6 b3 38 a7 b2 39 a8=♕+.

36 a6 ♖c3

Or 36...♖a3 37 ♖xa3 bxa3 38 a7 and again the fact that it is check on a8 wins.

37 a7 ♖c8 38 ♖xb4!

White has no need to hurry to queen as the black rook isn't going anywhere. Instead the impulsive 38 a8=♕ ♖xa8 39 ♖xa8+ ♔g7 40 ♖b8 ♗c3 would make the win much harder, if indeed it is possible.
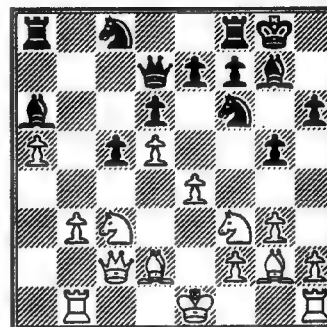
38...♔g7 39 ♖b8 ♖c1+ 40 ♔g2 ♖a1 41 a8=♕ ♖xa8 42 ♖xa8 ♔f6 43 f4 ♗c3 44 g4 h6 45 h4 ♗b4 46 ♖h8 1-0

Black resigned as the e7 pawn is going after 46...♔g7 47 ♖e8 ♔f6 48 g5+.

Incidentally, I played both the protagonists Larry Kaufman and Bela Lengyel a couple of years ago and they are still playing great chess. That is one of the wonderful things about chess – there aren't many footballers or tennis players who are still going strong after a thirty or forty year career!

A.Aleksandrov – K. Van der Weide
Saint Vincent 2000

If everything else was equal, then the white king would be a serious liability on e1 and White would try to keep the centre blocked. But Black has a poorly placed knight on c8, passive rooks and a serious structural weakness on g5.

In fact 19 e5! gives White a crushing advantage.

If 19...dxe5 20 ♘xe5 ♕d6 21 ♘c4 clears the way for White to castle kingside while remaining a sound pawn up, for example 21...♗xc4 22 bxc4 ♖xa5? 23 ♘e4 wins the exchange, while 22...♕e5+ 23 ♘e2 ♘d6 24 ♗c3 forces the exchange of queens with a winning endgame.

In the game Black tried 19...♘h7, no doubt hoping for 20 exd6? exd6 when he will have an attack down the e-file after 21...♖e8+.

But White's attack got in first after

20 h4! g4 21 ②g5!! ②xg5

Black is also obliterated after 21...hxg5 22 hxg5 f5 23 gxf6.

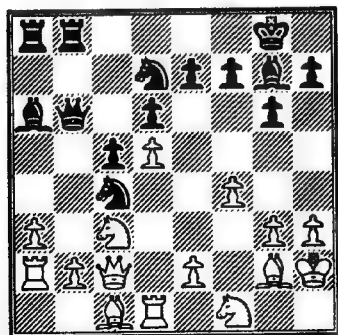**22 hxg5 ♗xe5 23 ♖xh6 f5 24 ♖g6+ ♔f7 25 ♖e6 ♔e8 26 ♖h1**

The white king may be in the centre, but all his pieces are working vey efficiently on the flanks.

26...cxb4 27 ♖xb4 ♖a7 28 ②a4 ♖c7 29 ♕b3 1-0

A pawn down and with all his pieces in a stranglehold, Black has had enough.

O.Averkin – L.Alburt
USSR 1974

Black used the b3 square that White had so graciously bestowed upon him:

20...♕b3!

White is loathe to part with his queen as she is not only a staunch defender of the queenside, but her disappearance sounds the death knell on any kingside mating attack. Or at least I assume these were White's emotions. The game was played way back in 1974 and maybe Averkin thought – as many other players did at the time – that the endgame a pawn up would be at least okay for him?

21 ♗e4 ♕xc2 22 ♗xc2

It looks as if White has successfully bolstered his queenside, but Alburt found a startling combination:

22...②xb2!! 23 ♗xb2 ♗c4
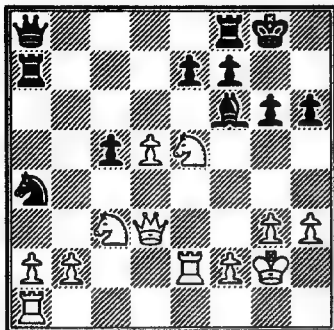
The point: the rook on a2 dare not move as b2 would collapse, but this means that the white pieces have to set themselves up for the traditional ♖xb2! tactic.

24 ♖da1 ♖xb2! 25 ♖xb2 ♗xc3

White is still a pawn up but he can't prevent his pawn structure disintegrating.

26 ♖b7 ♗xa1 27 ♖xd7 ♗xe2 28 ②d2 ♖xa3 29 ♖xe7 ♖a2 30 ♖xe2 ♖xc2 31 ♔h1 ♔g7 32 ♖g2 c4 33 ②b1 ♖xg2 34 ♔xg2 ♗b2 0-1

D.Rajkovic – J.Fedorowicz
Brussels 1987

Black has to react instantly as 20 ♘c6 is looming. Therefore he counterattacked on the queenside with **19...♘xb2!** when 20 ♖xb2 ♗xe5 would be highly unpleasant for White – all his pieces apart from the queen would be lined up invitingly along the black bishop's diagonal. And there would also be the small matter of the doomed pawn on d5. So White tried **20 ♕f1** but was dismembered by a pin along his third rank:

20...♖a3 21 ♖c1 ♘a4 22 ♘d7

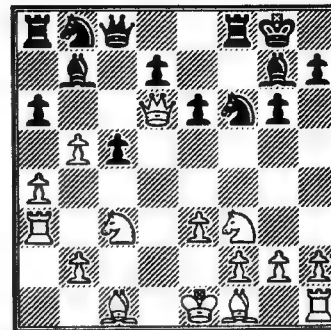There was nothing to be done – all the white pieces were paralysed by the pin.

22...♗xc3 23 ♘xf8 ♗b2 24 ♕e4 ♕xf8 25 ♖xb2

White can't bail out with a rook for two pieces as Black threatened 25...♘c3.

25...♘xb2 26 ♖xc5 ♖a8 27 ♖c7 ♖c8 28 ♖xc8 ♕xc8 29 ♕xe7 ♘c4 30 ♕b4 ♕a6

and Black eventually made his extra piece count.

V.Danilov – C.Navrotescu
Baile Tusnad 2001

White shows complete contempt for the bishop on g7. Here 12 b4?? is a disastrous move as it uproots the pawn that defends the knight on c3, and opens the c file for the black queen to attack the knight. After **12...cxb4 13 ♕xb4 ♘d5!** White had no choice but to resign as 14 ♘xd5 ♕xc1+ followed by 15...♗xd5 costs him a piece. White can never afford to be complacent about the black bishop on g7.

R.Almond – S.Palatnik
Hastings 1999

Besides the pressure along the a and b files, it is important to notice that White is vulnerable along the diagonal a7-g1.

After **20 ♗xd4? ♖xa4!** is a strong tactical riposte, as if **21 bxa4 ♗xd4+ 22 ♔f1** (22 ♖xd4 ♕xb1+) **22...♕xb1 23. ♖xb1 ♖xb1+** wins all White's pieces, including the queen. So White must play **21 ♗xg7**, which on the face of it looks winning as if 21...♔xg7 22 bxa4 leaves White a lot of material ahead. But alas for him, Black has a way of combining a frontal attack on the a2 pawn with a check...

21...♕a7+! 22 ♔h1 ♖xa2 23 ♖b2 ♖xb2 24 ♕xb2 ♕e3!

The queen swoops into the centre of the board and attacks b3, e4 and f4. White's pawn centre is bound to collapse, but things are still tense as White can play for mate either on g7 or along the e file which will shortly be opened. Black has therefore to show great vigilance.

25 ♗h6 ♘f6 26 ♕a1 ♕xe4!

Bold and best. The e4 pawn is far more valuable than the weakling on b3. In case you missed the point of Black's previous move, if 26...♘xe4 or 26...♘g4 there is a mate in one on g7.

27 ♖e1 ♕xd5 28 ♖xe7 ♖a8 29 ♕e1 ♕d4!

Both players have weak back ranks, but the black pieces prove to be better coordinated.

30 ♖c7

Black threatened 30...♖a1, which means that White has had to dilute the force of his attack down the e file by moving his rook to c7, so that 30...♖a1? can be answered by 31 ♖c8 and mates; but now the black knight is freed as it is no longer required to
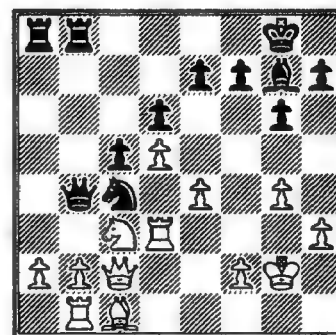
stay on f6 to rule out a mating combination with ♖e8+. This allows Black's mating combination to get in first or, more prosaically, the capture of the bishop on h6:

30....♘g4! 31 ♖c4 ♕f2! 32 ♕c1

If 32 ♕xf2 ♖a1+ 33 ♕g1 ♘f2 mate.

32...♘xh6 0-1

K.Aseev – A.Khalifman
St Petersburg 1995

A chance to see Benko expert Khalifman in action. He began with **26...♗xc3!** Black is often loathe even to contemplate this exchange but here it is tactically strong as it not only creates a pin on the b file by removing a defender of the rook on b1 but also opens the way for an attack on e4.

Thus if 27 ♖xc3 ♘a3! wins the exchange. So White played **27 ♕xc3** in the game and duly lost after **27...♘a3!?** (attacking both b1 and a3) **28 bxa3? ♕xe4+ 29 ♖f3 ♖xb1 30 ♗b2 ♕d4! 31 ♕xd4 cxd4 32 ♗xd4 ♖b5 33 ♖c3 ♖xd5 34 ♗e3 ♖da5** This all looks very convincing, and give yourself a pat on the back if you found the idea of 27...♘a3. However, analysis later

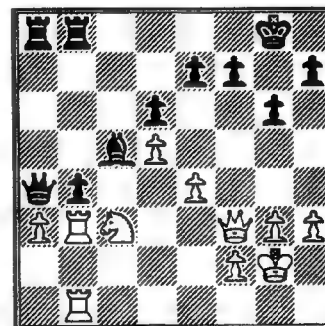revealed that White could have escaped the worst with the computer-like sequence of moves **28 ♕xb4 ♖xb4 29 ♗d2! ♖bb8** (the point is that the black knight is trapped after 29...♘xb1 30 ♗xb4 cxb4 31 ♖d1) **30 ♖a1! ♘c4** (if 30...♖xb2 31 ♗c1 wins for White as the knight is again trapped after 31...♖b1 32 ♖xb1 ♘xb1 33 ♖b3) **31 b3 ♘xd2 32 ♖xd2 ♖xb3!** with 'only' a promising endgame for Black. Of course it would be extraordinarily difficult for even the best player in the world to discover this crafty sequence of defensive moves for White. However, objectively speaking it means that 26...♗xc3 was still the best move, but after 27 ♕xc3 Black should settle for 27...♖xa2 when he has greater winning chances through piling up on the b2 pawn.

C.Hoi – J.Hodgson
Copenhagen 1985

The white queen was forcibly ejected from e4 with **20...♖a4!!** when 21 ♕xa4 ♘xc3 left a4, e2 and f3 all hanging. 22 ♕f4 ♘xe2 is hopeless, so White tried giving up his queen, but he didn't survive long: **22 ♖xe5 ♘xa4 23 ♖e1 ♕d5 24 ♗f4 ♘b2 25 ♗h6 ♖a8 26 fxg6 hxg6 27 ?? ♘d3 28 ♖ed1 c4 29 ♖d2 ?? 30 ♖c2 ♖b8 0-1**

A.Goldin – A.Fominyh
Elista 1995

If 27...bxc3? 28 ♖xb8+ wins as White will even pick up the c3 pawn with check. But **27...♕xa3!** does the trick. After **28 ♖xa3 ♖xa3** the threat of 29...♗d4 ensures that Black will also pick up the knight for his queen. The game continued **29 ♕d3 ♖ba8!** (he mustn't hurry with 29...♖xc3 as 30 ♕xc3! turns the tables.) **30 ♖c1 ♖xc3 31 ♖xc3 bxc3 32 ♕xc3** White appears to be at least okay, but now **32...♖a2!** will rip up the base of his pawn chain on f2. After **33 h4 ♖xf2+ 34 ♔h1 ♖e2** despite the nominal equality in material, White is lost as the g3 pawn can also be targeted. If both sides had another minor piece then things might be different, as with the help of an ally the queen might be able to puncture a hole in Black's pawn structure; but as things stand she is helpless. The rest of the game was agony for White:

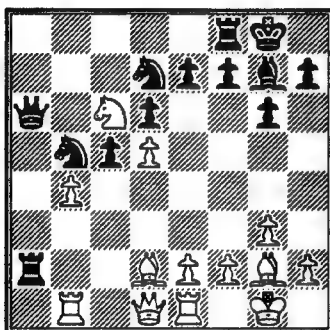**35 ♕f3 ♖e3 36 ♕f4 h5 37 ♔g2 ♖e1 38 ♕f3 ♗d4 39 g4**

If White does nothing Black can play 39...♖c1, 40...♗e5 and 41...♖c3 winning the g3 pawn.

39...♖g1+ 40 ♔h2 hxg4 41 ♕d3 g3+ 42 ♔h3 ♗e5 43 ♕f3 ♖b1 44 h5 gxh5 45 ♔h4 ♖b2 46 ♔xh5 ♖h2+ 47 ♔g5 ♗f6+ 48 ♔g4 g2 0-1

In the Benko Mainline, Black's position II particularly conducive to a positional queen sacrifice. This is because he has a rock solid pawn structure and a secure king – both crucial factors in blunting the power of the white queen. In such situations the only serious danger of Black losing is if White himself has a passed pawn.

J.Rowson – B.Vuckovic
Gibraltar 2004

The best response is **19...c4!**

If Black is the sort of player who ventures 3...b5 then he is going to be more than happy to offer the e-pawn in return for a tremendous passed pawn.

20 Ec1

White decides he cannot afford the luxury of taking on e7 as he needs his knight to fight the queenside pressure.

20...c3 21 Bg5 Ee8 22 Ec2 De5!

Over the next moves Black wears down White's resistance to the passed pawn.

23 Da5 Eb2 24 Exb2 cxb2 25 Bd2 Ec8 26 Be4 Dc3 27 Bxc3 Exc3 28 Wb1 Wb4!!

A brilliant change of front. Black gives up the passed pawn in order to set up decisive threats on the kingside.
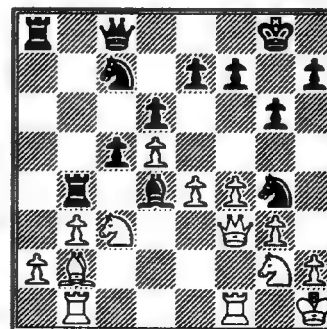
29 Wxb2 Dg4!

With the irresistible double threat of 30...Wxf2+ and 30...Exg3+ winning the white queen. The only way White can fight on is by giving up his queen.

30 e3 Exe3 31 Wd2 Bc3 32 Wxe3 Dxe3 33 Exe3 Bd4 34 Ee2 Bxf2+!

The tactics haven't finished. White loses a key pawn as if 35 Exf2 Wxb4 picks up either the knight or bishop. He tried 35 Bg2 but was eventually ground down after 35...Bd4 36 Dc6 e5! 37 dxe6 fxe6 etc.

P.Nikolic – V.Topalov
Linares 1997

A happy moment to end our discussion of the Benko Gambit. After 22 h3?? De5! White had to resign as 23 fxe5 Wxh3 is mate while otherwise he loses the queen. A combination out of the ordinary – normally White would have a bishop and not a knight on g2.
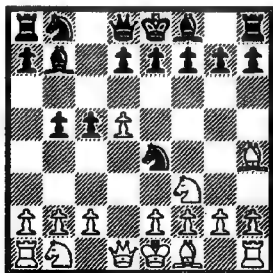
Details

A note on move order

The only important transposition of which you need to be aware is that in the mainline after 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 e4 ♗xf1 8 ♔xf1 d6 9 g3 ♗g7 10 ♔g2 0-0 11 ♘f3 ♘bd7 the moves 12 ♖e1 and 13 h3 or 12 h3 and 13 ♖e1 are usually interchangeable. Black responds with his usual assortment of ideas, though check the details in the cases where White plays 12 ♖e1 and makes do without h2-h3 in order to act quickly in the centre.

There are naturally other transpositions, e.g. after 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 g3 d6 8 ♗g2 Black has a choice between 8...♘bd7 9 ♘f3 ♗g7 and 8...♗g7 9 ♘f3 ♘bd7, but these don't tend to be of much importance.
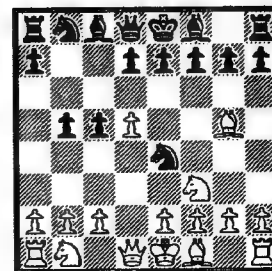
(1) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 c5 3 d5 b5 4 ♗g5! 4 c4 – Benko Gambit 4...♘e4 5 ♗h4 ♗b7! Xd5. 5...♕a5+? 6 ♘bd2 ♗b7 7 a4! ♗xd5 8 axb5 ♕c7 9 ♖a4± Kasparov-Miles, Basel 1986

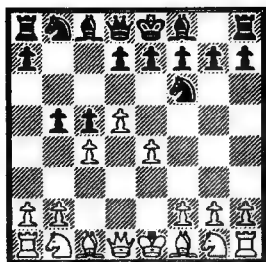5 ♕d3 6 e3!? g6 7 c3 ♕a5 8 ♘bd2 ♘xd2 (8...♗xd5!? 9 ♘b3 ♗xb3 10 axb3↑) 9 ♕xd2 ♗g7 10 e4 d6 11 ♗d3 ♘d7 12 0-0 a6 13 ♖fc1 ♖c8 14 h3 ♕b6 15 ♗f1 ♘f6 16 ♖e1 0-0 17 a4± Timman-Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 2001; 6 a4!? a6 7 ♕d3 ♕a5+ 8 c3 f5 9 ♘bd2 e6! 10 ♘xe4 fxe4 11 ♕xe4 ♗xd5 12 ♕f4 ♘c6 13 e4 ♗b3 14 ♗e2 bxa4 15 0-0 ♗e7∞ Burmakin-Avrukh, Ubeda 2001 6...f5! 7 ♘c3? 7 ♘bd2 ♘a6 8 c3! c4 9 ♕d4 ♘xd2 10 ♘xd2 ♕b6 11 ♕e5 ♘c5 12 ♕xf5 ♗g6 13 ♕e5!? (13 ♕xg6+ hxg6 14 ♗g5 ♗xd5 15 f3 e5 16 e4 ♗c6 = Hubner-Topalov, Istanbul 2000) 13...d6 14 ♕d4 ♕h5 15 b3 ♖c8!? 16 bxc4 bxc4 17 f3 ♕xd5 18 ♕xc4 ♕c6 19 e4∞/± Bocharov-Shinkevich, Tomsk 2001 7...c4! 8 ♕d4 ♕a5 9 e3 e6 10 dxe6 dxe6 11 0-0-0 ♗d5!!-+ 12 ♘xe4 fxe4 13 ♘e5 ♕xa2 14 ♘xc4 ♗c6 0-1 Lodhi-Ghaem Maghami, Turkey 2000
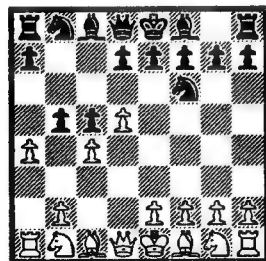
(2) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 c5 3 d5 b5 4 ♗g5 ♘e4

5 ♕d3?! 5 h4 g6 6 ♘bd2 ♘xg5 7 hxg5 ♗g7 8 e4 ♘a6 9 a4 (9 c3!?) 9...♗xb2 10 axb5 ♘c7 11 ♖a2 ♗g7 12 c4 d6 13 ♕b3 e6 14 ♗d3 ♔f8 15 ♖a3 exd5 16 exd5 a6! 17 0-0 ♖b8 18 ♖e1 h6!∓ Kozul – Topalov, Istanbul 2000; 5 ♗f4 ♗b7 6 ♕d3 f5 7 ♘bd2 c4 8 ♕d4 ♘a6! 9 c3 9 ♘xe4?! fxe4 10 ♕xe4 ♗b4! ∆ 11 0-0-0 ♕a5 12 a3 ♘xd5! 13 ♖xd5 e6-+ 9...♘c7 10 ♘xe4 fxe4 11 ♗xc7 ♕xc7 12 ♘g5 ♕f4 13 h4 h6 14 g3 ♕f6 15 ♘xe4 ♕xd4 16 cxd4 ♗xd5 17 ♗g2 e6 18 0-0 ♗e7 19 ♖fd1 0-0∓ ½-½ Hebden-Hodgson, Millfield 2000 5...♘xg5 6 ♘xg5 g6!∓ 7 e4 (7 ♕xb5!?) 7...♗g7 8 c3 0-0 9 ♗e2 h6 10 ♘f3 exd5 11 ♕xd5 ♕b6! 12 ♘bd2 ♗b7 13 ♕b3 c4 14 ♕d1 d6 15 a4 a6 16 axb5 axb5 17 ♖xa8 ♗xa8 18 0-0 ♘d7 19 ♖e1 ♘c5 20 ♗f1 ♖e8∓ 21 ♕c2 h6 22 e3 ♗b7 23 ♕b1 h5 24 h4 ♕c6 25 ♗g2 ♘d3 26 ♖f1 d5 27 b3 ♕c5 28 exd5 ♗xd5 29 bxc4 bxc4 30 ♘g5 ♗xg2 31 ♔xg2 ♕d5+ 32 ♘gf3 ♗xc3 33 ♕c2 ♗xd2 34 ♕xd2 ♖e5 35 ♖a1 ♖f5 36 ♕e3 ♘e5 0-1 Golod-Topalov, Bugojno 1999

(3) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 e4?! 4 f3 bxc4 (4...e6) 5 e4 d6 6 ♗xc4 (6 ♘a3 g6 7 ♘xc4 ♗g7 8 ♗d2 0-0 9 ♗a5 ♕d7∞) 6...g6 7 ♘e2 ♗g7 8 ♘bc3 0-0 9 0-0 ♘bd7!∞ Δ ♘b6
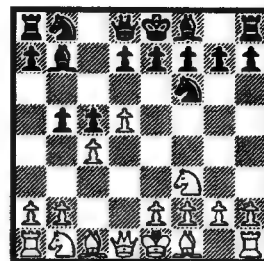

4...♘xe4 5 ♕f3 ♕a5+ 6 ♘d2 ♘d6 7 cxb5 ♘xb5! 7...a6 8 b6! g6 9 b4! cxb4 10 ♗b2 f6 11 ♘b3 ♕xb6 12 h4!↑ Mirkovic-Nevednichy, Yugoslavia 1996 **8 d6 ♘c6 9 ♗xb5 ♕xb5 10 ♘e2 e5 11 0-0 ♗a6 12 ♖e1 ♕d3 13 ♕xd3 ♗xd3 14 ♘f4 ♘b4 15 a3 ♘c2 16 ♘xd3 ♘xa1 17 ♘c4 ♘b3-+** Shchukin-Gubajdullin, St Petersburg 1999
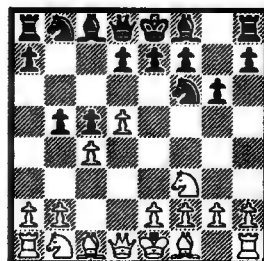
(4) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 a4

4...b4 4...bxc4 5 ♘c3 g6 6 e4 d6 7 ♗xc4 ♗g7 8 f4!? 0-0 9 ♘f3 ♗a6 10 ♗b5!± Ward-Adams, Hastings 1995; 4...♕a5+!? 5 ♗d2 b4 6 f3 (6 ♗c1!? Δ b2-b3, ♗b2.) 6...g6∓ Shikerov-Janev, Bulgaria 1992 **5 ♘d2 e5! 6 b3 d6 7 ♗b2 g6 8 g3** 8 e4!? ♗g7 9 ♗d3 **8...♗g7 9 e4 a5 10 ♗g2 ♖a7!? 11 h4 ♖e7 12 ♗f3 h5 13 ♕e2 ♗g4 14 ♘h3 ♘bd7 15 ♘g5 ♘f8 16 ♘f1 ♘8h7∞** Ward-Skjoldborg, Copenhagen 2003

(5) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 ♘f3 4 ♘d2!? bxc4 5 e4 c3! (5...d6?! 6 ♗xc4 g6 7 b3 ♗g7 8 ♗b2 0-0 9 ♘gf3± Serper-Miton, Philadelphia 2000.) 6 bxc3 g6 7 c4 d6 8 ♗b2 ♗g7 9 ♗d3 0-0 10 ♕c2 e5! 11 ♘e2 ♘bd7 12 0-0 ♘h5 13 ♖ab1 ♘b6 14 f4 exf4 15 ♗xg7 ♘xg7 16 ♘xf4 ♘d7 17 ♘f3 g5! 18 ♘e2 g4 19 ♘d2 ♘e5 20 ♘g3 ♕g5∓ Kludacz-Radziewicz, Brzeg Dolny 2000 **4...♗b7**

5 ♘bd2 5 ♕c2 bxc4 6 e4 g6 (6...e6!? 7 dxe6 dxe6 8 e5 ♘d5 9 ♗xc4 ♘c6 10 0-0 ♗e7∞) 7 ♗xc4 ♗g7 8 ♘c3 0-0? (8...d6±) 9 e5 ♘e8 10 h4! d6 11 h5 dxe5 12 hxg6 hxg6 13 ♕e4! ♘d6 14 ♕h4 f6 15 ♗d3 e4 16 ♘xe4 ♘f5 17 ♕h7+ ♔f7 18 ♘eg5+! fxg5 19 ♘e5+ ♔f6 20 ♕xg6+ ♔xe5 21 ♕e6+ ♔d4 22 ♕e4# Conquest-Degraeve, Clichy 2001 **5...bxc4 6 e4 ♕a5?** 6...e6!? 7 dxe6 dxe6! 8 e5 ♘d5 9 ♘xc4 ♗e7 10 a3 0-0 11 ♗d3 ♘c6 12 ♕e2 ♘b6 13 0-0 ♘xc4 14 ♗xc4 ♕c7 15 ♖e1 ♖ad8 16 ♗d2 ♘d4!∓ Hoang Thanh Trang-T.Fogarasi, Budapest 2003 **7 ♗xc4 d6 8 0-0 ♘bd7 9 ♕e2 ♕c7 10 b4! g6 11 bxc5 ♕xc5 12 ♖b1 ♖b8 13 e5! dxe5 14 ♘xe5 ♗g7 15 ♘xd7 ♔xd7 16 ♗b5+ ♔d8 17 ♗c6 ♔c7 18 ♘b3 ♕d6 19 ♗f4! 1-0** Radjabov-Salmensuu, Torshavn 2000

(6) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 ♘f3 g6

▌ **cxb5 5 ♕c2 ♗g7 6 e4 0-0! 7 cxb5 ♗b7 8 ♘c3 e6 9 d6?** (9
♗e2∞) **9...a6 10 ♗e3 axb5 11 ♗xb5** (11 ♗xc5 ♘a6!? 12 ♗e3 b4
attack on e4) **11...♕b6 12 a4 ♘c6 13 0-0 ♘d4! 14 ♕d3 ♘g4 15
h3 ♘xf3+ 16 gxf3 ♘e5 17 ♕d1 f5!∓ 18 f4 ♘c6 19 e5 g5!** Hoang
Thanh Trang - Prusikhin, Budapest 2003 **5...a6** ▌ **♕c2 6 b6 ♕xb6
7 ♘c3 d6** ▌ **e4 ♗g7 9 ♘c4 0-0 10 0-0 ♗g4=** Epishin-Georgiev,
Germany 1997; 6 ♘c3 ♗g7!? (6...axb5 7 d6 ♗b7 ▌ dxe7 ♗xe7 9
♘xb5±) **7 e4 0-0 8 bxa6 d6 9 ♗e2 ♗xa6 10 0-0 ♕b6 11 ♖b1
♘bd7 12 ♖e1 ♖fb8 13 b3 ♘g4∞** Radjabov-Nemet, Biel 2000
**6...axb5 7 e4 ♕a5+ 8 ♗d2 ♕a4! 9 ♕xa4 bxa4 10 ♘c3 ♗g7
11 e5! ♘g4 12 ♗f4 f6! 13 exf6 ♘xf6 14 a3 0-0 15 0-0-0 d6
16 ♖e1 ♖a7 17 ♗b5 ♗a6 18 ♗xa4 ♗c4? 18...♘g4! 19 ♗g3
♗xc3 20 bxc3 ♗c4 21 ♗d1 ♖xd5∓ 19 ♗g5 ♘xd5 20 ♗b5
♗xb5 21 ♘xd5 ♗c4 22 ♖xe7 ♖a6 23 ♖d1 ♘c6 24 ♖b7 ♘a5
25 ♖b6 ♘b3+ 26 ♔c2 ♘d4+ 27 ♘xd4 ♖xf2+ 28 ♖d2
♖xd2+ 29 ♔xd2 ♗xd4 30 ♖b8+ ♔f7 31 ♖b7+ ♔g8 32
♖b8+ ♔f7 33 ♖b7+ ♔g8 34 ♘f6+ ♗xf6 35 ♗xf6 h5 36
♖g7+ ♔f8 37 ♖xg6 ♔f7 38 ♖h6 d5 39 ♗g5 ♖xh6 40 ♗xh6
♗f1 41 g3 d4 42 a4 ♔e6 43 ♔e1 ♗d3 44 ♔f2 ♔d5 45 ♔f3
c4 46 ♗d2 c3 47 bxc3 dxc3 48 ♗xc3 ♔c6 49 h3 ♗f5 50 g4
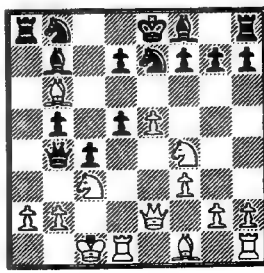hxg4+ 51 hxg4 ♗xg4+ 52 ♔xg4 ½-½** Bareev-Topalov,
Sarajevo 2000

**(7) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 ♘c3 axb5 6 e4 6
♘xb5 ♗a6 7 ♘c3 = mainline 5 bxa6 6...b4 7 ♘b5**

7...d6 7...♘xe4?? ▌ **♕e2 f5** ▌ **f3 ♖a5 10 fxe4 ♗a6 11 exf5 ♗xb5
12 ♕h5+ g6 13 fxg6 ♗g7 14 gxh7+ ♔f8 15 ♕f5+ ♔e8
16 ♕g6+ ♔f8 17 ♗h6 1-0** Zontakh-Milanovic, Belgrade 1998
▌ **♗f4** ▌ **♗c4 ♘bd7! 9 ♘f3 ♘b6 10 ♗d3 g6 11 b3 ♗g7 12 ♗b2
0-0 13 0-0 ♗a6∓ Xb5;** ▌ **♘f3 g6 9 e5 dxe5 10 ♘xe5 ♗g7 11 ♗c4**

0-0 12 0-0 ♘e8!∓ △ **♘d6. ♗a6 8...g5! 9 ♗xg5 9 ♗e3!? ♘xe4 10
♗d3 ♕a5 11 ♕e2** (11 ♘e2!? f5 12 0-0 f4 13 ♗c1 ♘f6 14 ♖e1 ♔f7
15 b3 ♘bd7 16 ♗b2 ♘e5 17 ♗xe5 dxe5 18 ♗c4 ♔g7∞ Hansen-
Fedorowicz, Amsterdam 1990) **11...f5 12 f3 b3+ 13 ♔f1 ♗g7!?
14 fxe4 fxe4 15 ♗xe4 0-0+ 16 ♘f3 ♗a6 17 ♗d3 g4 18 ♗d2 ♕a4
19 ♘c3 ♕d4 20 ♗xa6 ♘xa6 21 axb3 gxf3 22 gxf3 ♖xf3+ 23 ♔e1
♖ff8 24 ♗e3 ♕h4+ 25 ♔d2 ♘b4 26 ♕g2 ♘h8 27 ♖hg1 ♗h6 28
♘e2 ♖xa1 29 ♖xa1 ♗xe3+ 0-1** Minzer-Fiorito, Buenos Aires
1994 **9...♘xe4 10 ♗f4 ♘f6! 10...♗g7!? 11 ♕e2 ♘f6 12 ♘xd6+
♔f8 13 ♘xc8 ♕xc8 14 d6** (14 ♕f3!? e6! 15 d6 ♘c6∞) **14...exd6
15 ♗xd6+ ♔g8 16 ♕c4 ♘bd7 17 ♘f3 ♕c6 18 ♘g5 ♘d5 19 ♖d1
♘7b6 20 ♕xc5 ♕e8+ 21 ♗e2 h6!∓** Dias-Gunnarsson, Istanbul
2000 **11 ♗c4 ♗g7 12 ♘e2 ♘bd7! 12...0-0 13 ♘g3 ♘bd7 14
♘f5!? 13 ♘g3 ♘b6 14 b3 0-0 15 0-0 ♗d7 16 ♕d2 ♘fxd5!∓
17 ♗h6 ♗xh6 18 ♕xh6 f6 19 ♗d3 ♖f7 20 a4 bxa3 21 ♘xa3
♕f8 22 ♕h4 ♘b4 23 ♗e2 d5 24 ♘b5 ♖xa1 25 ♖xa1 ♔h8 26
♘c3 e5 27 f4 c4 28 ♗h5 ♘d3 29 h3 ♖g7 30 fxe5 fxe5 31
bxc4 ♘xc4 32 ♔h2 ♘e3 33 ♗f3 ♘f4 34 ♖e1 d4 35 ♘ce2
♖g6 36 ♖a1 ♗c6 37 ♘g5 ♕e7 38 ♗xc6 ♕xg5 39 ♖a8+ ♔g7
40 ♖a7+ ♔f8 41 ♖a8+ ♔g7 42 ♖a7+ ♔f8 ½-½** Arencibia-
Ivanchuk, Cap d'Agde 1998

**(8) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 e6!? 5...axb5 6
e4 ♕a5+ 7 ♗d2 b4 8 ♘a3! d6** (8...♗a6? 9 ♘c4 ♕c7 10 ♘h3 d6
11 a3!± Gurevich-Miles, Manila 1990) **9 ♘c4 ♕d8** (9...♕a7!?±) **10
♗d3 e6! 11 dxe6 ♗xe6 12 ♘e2 d5 13 exd5 ♘xd5 14 ♘f4!?±** (14
0-0!?±) **6 e4 exd5 7 e5 ♕e7 8 ♕e2 ♘g8 9 ♘c3 ♗b7 10 ♘h3!
c4! 11 ♗e3 axb5 12 0-0-0 ♕b4! 13 ♘f4 ♘e7 14 ♗b6**

**14...h5! 15 ♖xd5! ♕xc3+!! 16 bxc3 ♘xd5 17 ♘xd5 17 ♕e4!?
♗a3+ 18 ♔d2 ♘xb6 19 ♕xb7 ♗c5 20 ♘d5 ♖xa2+ 21 ♔d1 0-0**

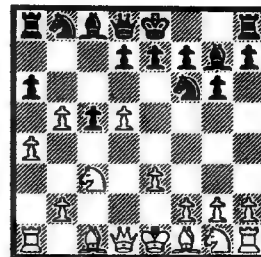22 ♘xb6 Allemann-Costantini, Biel 2001 22...♗xb6! 23 ♕xb6
♘c6∓ 17...♗xd5 18 ♕d2 ♗e6 19 ♗e2 ♘c6 20 f4 b4! 21 f5
bxc3 22 ♕xc3 ♖a3 23 ♕b2 c3 24 ♕b5 ♗xf5 25 ♖f1 ♖xa2!
26 ♖xf5 ♘b4 27 ♕a5 g6! 0-1 Lalic-Khalifman, Linares 1997

(9) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 e6 6 e4 exd5 7
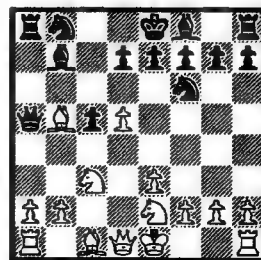e5 ♕e7 8 ♕e2 ♘g8 9 ♘c3 ♗b7 10 ♘h3! c4! 11 ♗e3 axb5
12 0-0-0 ♕b4 13 ♘f4 ♘e7 14 ♕f2!?

14...♕a5! 14...♘a6?! 15 ♔b1! ♘f5 16 ♘fxd5 ♗xd5 17 ♘xd5
♘xe3! 18 ♕xe3 (18 ♘xb4? ♗xd1 19 ♕d2 ♘xb4∓) 18...♕c5 19
♕xc5 ♗xc5 20 ♘c3 ♘c7 – Lalic-Alterman, Pula 1997 21 g3!± ∆
♗h3 15 ♗b6 ♕a6 16 ♖xd5!? ♗c6 16...♗xd5 17 ♘fxd5 ♘xd5
18 ♘xd5 ♕xa2 19 ♘c7+ ♔e7 20 ♕c5++- 17 a3 ♘g6 18
♘xg6 hxg6? 18...fxg6! 19 e6 (19 ♖xb5 ♗xb5 20 ♘d5 ♔f7 21
♘c7 ♕a4 22 ♘xb5 ♕xb5 23 ♕d4) 19...dxe6 20 ♖d8+ ♔f7∞/∓.
19 ♖xb5!! ♗xb5 20 ♘d5 ♕b7 21 ♘c7+ ♔d8 22 ♘xb5+
♔c8 23 ♗c4 ♕c6 24 ♔b1 ♕xc4 25 ♖c1 ♕xc1+ 26 ♔xc1
♘c6 27 ♗c7 ♖a6 28 ♕e2 ♖a8 29 ♕c4 f6 30 ♕f7 ♗c5 31
♕xg7 ♖xh2 32 exf6 ♖h1+ 33 ♔d2 ♘d4 34 ♕g8+ ♔b7 35
♕d5+ 1-0 Lim Chuing Hoong-Wong Zi Jing, Penang 2000

(10) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗g7
7 a4 7 e4!? 0-0 8 a4 ♗b7 9 e5 ♘e8 10 ♘f3 d6 11 ♗f4 ♕a5∞
Estremera Panos-Vasilev, Cutro 2002

7...0-0 8 ♖a3 8 ♘f3!? ♗b7 9 ♖b1 e6 10 dxe6 fxe6 11 ♗e2 axb5
12 ♗xb5 d5 13 0-0 ♘bd7 14 b4!± Hansen-Cramling, Reykjavik
1995; 8 ♗c4!? ♗b7 9 ♘ge2 e6 10 ♘f4 axb5 11 ♘xb5 exd5 12
♘xd5 ♘c6∞ Notkin-Khalifman, St Peterburg 1995 8...e6
8...♗b7!? 9 ♘f3 axb5 10 ♗xb5 e6 11 dxe6 fxe6 12 ♕d6 ♗xf3! 13
gxf3 ♕c8 14 0-0∞ Peturrson-Fedorowicz, Reykjavik 1990 9 ♘f3
♗b7 10 dxe6 fxe6 11 ♕d6! 11 ♗e2? d5 12 bxa6 ♘xa6 13 0-0
♘b4 ↑. 11...♕c8 12 b4?? 12 ♗e2 axb5 13 axb5 ♘e8 14 ♕d2 d5
15 ♖xa8 ♗xa8 16 0-0 ♘d7∞ Georgiev-Rogers, Biel 1993
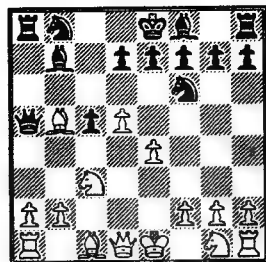12...cxb4 13 ♕xb4 ♘d5! 0-1 Danilov-Navrotescu, Baile Tusnad
2001

(11) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 axb5 6 ♗xb5
♕a5+ 7 ♘c3 ♗b7 8 ♘ge2

8...♘xd5 8...♗xd5!? 9 0-0 ♗c6 10 a4 g6? (10...e6∞) 11 e4! ♗g7
12 e5 ♘g4 13 f4± Babuła-Stocek, Czech Republic 2000 9 0-0
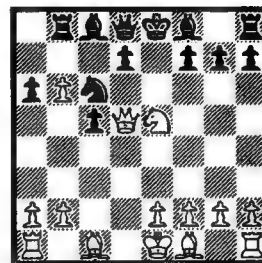♘c7!? 9...♘xc3 10 ♘xc3 e6 11 e4 ♗e7 (11...♗xe4?! 12 ♗xd7+

♘xd7 13 ♘xe4 ♕a4 Kramnik-M.Adams, Chalkidiki 1992 14 ♘d6+!? ♔e7 15 ♕f3!? ♔xd6 16 ♕xf7 with ▨ attack) 12 ♗f4 (12 a4 0-0!) 12...0-0 13 a4 ♕d8 14 ♗d6 ♘c6 15 ♘e2 = Novikov-Miton, World Open Warm Up 1999 10 ♗c4 e6! 10...♘c6 11 ♗d2! 11 ▨ ♗e7 12 ♘g3?! 12 ♗f4 12...♘c6 13 ♗d2 ♕b6 14 ♖b1 ♗a6 15 ♗xa6 ♕xa6 16 ♕g4 g6 17 ♗h6 ♘b5 18 ♘ge2 ♘bd4 19 ♘g3 ♖g8 20 ♗f4?! h5! 21 ♘xh5? ♖h8!-+Shapiro-Annakov, New York 2000

(12) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 axb5 ▨ ♗xb5 ♕a5+ 7 ♘c3 ♗b7 8 e4!? 8 ♗d2 ♕b6 9 ♕b3 (9 ♗c4 e6 10 ♕b3 ♕xb3 11 ♗xb3 ♘a6! 12 f3 ♘b4∓ Zimmerman-Chernin, Hungary 1999) 9...e6 10 e4 ♘xe4! 11 ♘xe4 ♗xd5 12 ♕d3 ♕b7 13 f3 c4 14 ♗xc4 ♗xc4 15 ♕xc4 d5 16 ♕c2 dxe4 17 ♕xe4 ♕xe4+ 18 fxe4 ♘d7=
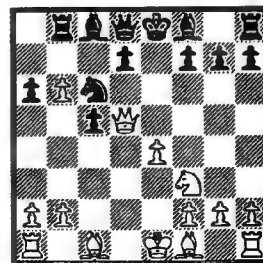

8...♘xe4 ▨ ♘ge2 ♘d6 10 ♗d3 10 ♗a4 g6 11 0-0 ♗g7 12 ♗g5 ♘f5! 13 ♗b5 0-0∞ Montecatine Rios-Komljenovic, Benasque 1993 10...♗xd5 11 0-0 ♗e6!? 11...♘c6 12 f4 g6 13 ♘e4 ♘f5 14 ♘4g3 ♘c6 15 ♘xf5 gxf5 16 ♘g3 c4 17 ♗c2 h5! 18 ♘xh5 ♘b4 19 ♘g3 ♕b6+ 20 ♔h1 ♗g7∓ Estremera Panos-Komljenovic, Pamplona 1995

(13) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 ▨ b6 e▨ 6 ♘c3 exd5 7 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 8 ♕xd5 ♘c6 ▨ ♘f3 ♖b8 10 ♘e5!?

12...♕f6 11 ♘xc6 dxc6 12 ♕f3 12 ♕e4+ ♗e7 13 g3 0-0 14 ♗g2 ♖xb6 15 0-0 ♗e6 16 ♕a4 ♖d8∞ Van Wely-Gelfand, Cap d'Agde 1996 12...♗e7! 13 ♗d2 ♕xb2!? 13...♕xf3 14 exf3 ♗f6 15 ♗c3 ♗xc3+ 16 bxc3 0-0 17 ♗c4 ♖e8+ 18 ♔d2 ♗f5 19 ♖ae1 ♖ed8+ 20 ♔e3 g5 ♖e3∞ Crouch-Trent, Camberley 2001 14 ♗c3 ♕xb6 15 ♗xg7? 15 e4! ♗e6 16 ♕g3 Parker-Claesen, Mondariz 2000 16...f6!? △ 17 ♕xg7 ♖g8 18 ♕xh7 c4!∞ 15...♖g8 16 ♗c3 c4! 17 ♕e4 ♗e6 18 ♕xh7 ♖g5 1▨ e3 ♗b4 20 ♕c2 ♕a5 21 ♗xb4 ♖xb4 22 ♔e2 c3! 0-1.Deiler-Degraeve, Metz 2000

(14) 1 d4 ♘f6 ▨ c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 ▨ b6 e▨ 6 ♘c3 ♘xd5 7 ♘xd5 exd5 8 ♕xd5 ♘c6 ▨ ♘f3 ♖b8 10 e4 10 ♗g5?! f6 11 ♗d2 ♕xb6 12 ♗c3 ♘b4! 13 ♕d1 d5 14 e4? (14 e3∓) 14...d4 ♗xb4 ♕xb4+ 16 ♘d2 d6 17 b3 ♗f4! 18 g3 ♗g4 19 ♗e2 ♗xe2 20 ♕xe2 d3! 21 ♕xd3 ♖d8 22 ♕xd8+ ♔xd8 23 gxf4 ♔e7 24 ♖g1 ♖d8-+ Ivanisevic-Degraeve, Bled 2002; 10 ♗d2 ♕xb6 11 ♗c3 (11 ♘e5 ♘xe5 12 ♕xe5+ ♗e7 13 ♗c3 f6=) De Souza-Dianda, Paulisto 2000 11...♗e7!? 12 ♗xg7 ♘b4 13 ♕d1 ♖g8∞↑

10...♗e7 11 ♗c4 0-0 12 ♕h5 12 0-0 ♘a5!? 13 ♗d3 ♖xb6 14

♕h5 d5!?∞. 12...d6 13 0-0 ♖xb6 14 b3 ♗e6 15 ♗xe6 fxe6 16 ♕g4 ♕c8 17 ♗b2 ♗f6 17...e5?! 18 ♕xc8 ♖xc8 19 ♘d2 ♘d4 20 ♘c4± 18 ♗xf6 ♖xf6 19 ♘d2 ♕f8!∞ ⬜ ♘c4 ♖b7 21 ♖ ♖bf7 22 g3 d5 ⬛ ♘d2 ♘d4 24 ♖ae1 c4 25 exd5 exd5 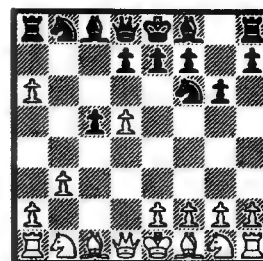⬛ bxc4 dxc4 27 ♘e4 ♖c6 28 ♘g5 ♖e7 29 ♕d1 ♖d7 ⬛ ♖e4 h6 31 ♘e6 ♖xe6 32 ♖xe6 ♕c5 ⬛ ♖e8+ ♔f7 ⬛ ♖e3 c3 35 ⬛ ♖d8 36 ♔g2 ♘c2 37 ♕xc2 ♕xe3 38 ♕b3+ ♔f6 ⬛ ⬜⬜ ♕e5 40 ♕xc3 ♕xc3 41 ♖xc3 ♖d2+ 42 ♔f3 ♖xa2 43 g4 ♖xh2 44 ♖c6+ ♔f7 ½-½ Gleizerov-Tregubov, Krasnoyarsk 2003

(15) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 b6 d6
5...a5?! 6 ♘c3 ♗a6? 7 f4! d6 8 ♘f3 ♘bd7 9 e4 ♗xf1 10 b7! ♖b8 11 ♖xf1 ♕c7 12 e5!+ – dxe5 13 fxe5 ♘xe5 14 ♗f4 ♘d3+ 15 ♕xd3 ♗xf4 16 ♕b5+ ♔d8 17 ⬜⬜ ♕c7 18 ♘g5 ♖xb7 19 ♘xf7+ ♔c8 20 ♕c6 ♖g8 21 ♖xf6! 1-0 Blees-Markus, Wijk aan Zee 1999; 5...♕xb6 6 ♘c3 g6 7 e4 d6 8 ♘f3 ♗g7 9 ♘d2 0-0 10 ♗e2 a5? (10...♘bd7 11 0-0 ♕c7 12 a4 ♖b8 ⩲ △ ♖b4∞.) 11 ♘c4 ♕d8 12 0-0 ♘bd7 13 ♗g5 a4 14 ♕c2 ♘b6 15 ♘e3 ♗a6 16 ♗xa6 ♖xa6 17 f4± Shabalov-Fedorowicz, Seattle 2003
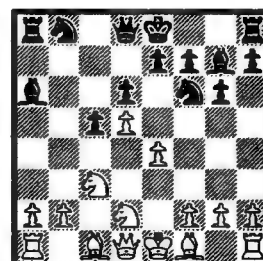
6 ♘c3 g6 6...♘bd7?! 7 a4 ♘xb6 8 e4 g6 9 a5 ♘bd7 10 f4 ♗g7 11 ♗c4 0-0 12 ♘f3 ♘e8!? 13 0-0 ♘c7 14 ♕d3 ♘b5 15 ♗d2 ♘d4 16 ♘a4 ♖a7 17 ♗c3 ♘xf3+ 18 ♕xf3 ♗xc3 19 ♘xc3± Tukmakov-Polgar, Amsterdam1990 7 e4 ♗g7 ⬛ a4 ♕xb6 9 a5 ♕b4! 10 ♖a4 ♕b7 11 ♘f3 0-0 12 ♘d2?! 12 ♗e2 ♗d7! 13 ♖a3 ♗b5 14 0-0 ♘bd7∞ Campos Moreno-Topalov, Aviles 1992 12...e6! 13 ♘c4?! exd5 14 exd5 ♗g4!∓ 15 ♗e2 ♗xe2 16 ♔xe2 ♕e7+ 17 ♔f1 ♘bd7 18 ♗f4 ♘e8 19 ♕e2 ♕f6 20 ♕d2 ♖b8 21 g4? 21 ♗g5 ♕f5 22 ♗e7? ♗xc3! 23 ♕xc3 ♕b1+ 24 ♕e1 ♕c2 25 ♕a1 ♘ef6 26 ♗xf8 ♘e4 27 ♕e1 ♖e8!-+; 21 h3 ♕d4!∓ 21...g5!! 22 ♗xg5 ⬜⬜ 23 ♖g1 ♗xc3 24 ♕xc3 ♕d1+ 25 ♔g2 ♕xd5+ 0-1 Hillarp Persson-Conquest, Torshavn 2000

(16) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6! 5...♗xa6?! 6 g3 d6 7 ♗g2 g6 8 b3! ♗g7 9 ♗b2 0-0 10 ♘h3 ♘bd7 11 0-0± 6 b3?!

6...♗g7 7 ♗b2 0-0 8 g3 ♘xa6! 9 ♗g2 d6 10 e4 ♗b7 11 ♘e2 e6! 12 ♘bc3 12 dxe6 fxe6 13 ♘d2 ♘b4 ↑ 12...exd5 13 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 14 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 15 exd5 ♕a5+ 16 ♕d2 ♕xd2+ 17 ♔xd2 ♘b4 18 ♘c3 ♖a3 19 ♖he1 ♗a6!∓ △ 20...c4 Stohl-Berg,Tallinn 1986

(17) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 ♘f3 7 f4 ♗g7 8 ♘f3 ♕a5! (8...0-0?! 9 e4 ♗xf1 10 ♖xf1 d6 11 e5! dxe5 12 fxe5 ♘g4 13 ♕e2±) 9 ♗d2 0-0 10 e4 d6∞ 7...d6 8 ♘d2 ♗g7 8...♕a5!? 9 e4?! ♗xf1 10 ♘xf1? ♘xe4 9 e4

9...♗xf1 10 ♘xf1 ♕a5! 11 ♗d2 0-0 12 ♘e3 ♘bd7 13 0-0 ♕a6 14 ♕c2 ♘e5! 15 b3 ♘fd7 16 f4 ♘d3 17 ⬜⬜ ♗d4 18 ♔h1 ♖fc8 19 ♖ab1 c4!∓ 20 b4 ♘f6 21 ♘ed1 ♖cb8 22 ♘e3 ♖c8 23 b5? 23 ♘ed1! ♕b7!? △ e7-e6; 23...♕b6!? 23...♕b6 24 ♘c4 ♘f2+ 25 ♖xf2 ♖xc4 26 ♖f3 ♖xa3 27 ♕b2 ♘xe4 28 ♕xa3 ♘xd2 29 ♕a2 ♗e3 30 ♖c1 ♕d4 31 b6 ♖xc3 0-1 Bareev-Kasparov, Linares 1994

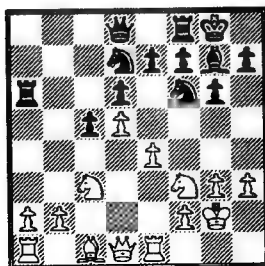**(18) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 e4 ♗xf1 8 ♔xf1 d6 9 g4 ♗g7 10 ♔g2 0-0 11 g5 ♘h5 12 ♘ge2 f5 13 gxf6 ♖xf6 14 ♗g5 ♖f7 15 ♕d2 ♕f8∞** Haba-Andruet, Toulouse 1990 **9 ♘f3 ♘bd7** 9...♗g7 10 h3 – 10 g3 ♘bd7 11 ♔g2 0-0 transposes – 10...0-0 11 ♔g1 ♘a6!? 12 ♔h2 ♕b6 13 ♕e2 ♘b4 14 a4 e6!∞ Hjartarson-Cramling, Nordic zt 1992) **10 g3 10 h3!? ♗g7 11 ♔g2 0-0 12 ♔h2 ♕a5 13 ♖e1 ♖fb8 14 ♖e2 ♘e8∞** (14...♘b4!?∞) **10...♗g7 11 ♔g2 0-0 12 ♖e1 12 h3 ♘b6** (12...♖a6. 12...♕a5, 12...♕c7) **13 ♖e1 ♕d7 14 ♕c2 ♕b7 15 ♖b1 ♘fd7 16 ♗f4 ♘c4 17 ♕e2 ♕b4 18 ♖ec1 ♖fb8∞** Goldin-Fominyh, Elista 1995 **12...♖a6!? 12...♘b6!? 13 e5?!**

13...♘g4 14 e6 fxe6 15 ♕e2 ♘de5! 16 ♕xa6 ♖xf3 17 ♖e2 ♕f6 18 ♘d1 ♖d3 19 ♗f4 g5 20 ♗xe5 ♕f3+ 21 ♔h3 ♗xe5 22 ♕c8+ ♔g7 23 ♕xe6 ♕xe2 24 ♘c3 ♘xf2+ 25 ♔g2 ♕f3+ 26 ♔g1 ♘h3+ 27 ♕xh3 ♗d4# 0-1 Bekker Jensen-Petrosian, Hamburg 2000

(19) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 ♘f3 d6 8 e4 ♗xf1 9 ♔xf1 ♘bd7 10 g3 ♗g7 11 ♔g2 0-0 12 ♖e1 ♖a6 13 h3
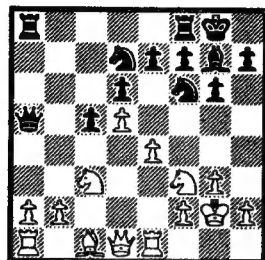

13 ♕c2 ♕a8 14 a4!? ♖b8 15 b3 e6? (15...♘e8!?) 16 dxe6 fxe6 17 ♗b2! ♖f8 18 ♘b5 ♕b7 19 ♖ad1 d5 20 exd5 exd5 21 ♖e7! d4 22 ♕c4+ ♔h8 23 ♖d3 ♘g4 24 ♖xg7! ♔xg7 25 ♘bxd4!+ Gyimesi-Stamenkov, Nova Gorica 2004 **13...♕a8 14 ♗g5 ♘b6!? 15 ♕d2? 15 ♕c2!∞ 19... ♘a4 16 ♖e2 ♖b8 17 ♘d1 e6 18 dxe6 fxe6 19 ♕c2 d5 20 e5 ♘e4 21 b3 ♘b6 22 ♗f4 c4! 23 ♖c1 ♘c5 24 ♘d4 ♘d3 25 ♘xe6 d4+ 26 ♔g1 ♘xc1 27 ♖xc1 d3 28 ♖e1 ♖xa2 29 bxc4 ♕a5 30 ♖f1 d2 31 ♕b1 ♘d7 32 ♕e4 ♗xe5 33 c5 ♗xf4 34 ♕xf4 ♖e8 35 ♘c7 ♖f8 36 ♕c4+ ♖f7 37 ♘e6 ♘e5 38 ♕d5 ♘f3+ 39 ♔h1 ♕a8 0-1** Shishkin-Malakhatko, Kiev 2001

(20) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 e4 ♗xf1 8 ♔xf1 d6 9 g3 ♗g7 10 ♔g2 0-0 11 ♘f3 ♘bd7 12 ♖e1 ♖a6 13 h3 ♕a8 14 ♗g5 h6 15 ♗d2 e6

16 dxe6 fxe6 17 ♕c2 17 ♔g1!? d5? (17...g5! △ 18 e5? ♘d5! Xf3) 18 exd5 exd5 19 ♘h4 d4 20 ♕b3+ ♔h7 21 ♕c2 dxc3 22 ♕xg6+ ♔g8 23 ♗xc3 ♖f7 24 ♘f5 ♔f8 25 ♖ad1 ♘h5 26 ♖d6 ♖xd6 27 ♗xg7+ ♘xg7 28 ♕xd6+ ♔g8 29 ♘xh6+ 1-0 Haba-Riemersma, Germany 1996 ; **17 a4!? g5 18 ♖a3 ♖b6 19 ♗c1 ♕c6 20 ♖b3 ♖a6 21 ♖a3 d5 22 exd5 exd5 23 ♔g1 d4 24 ♘b5 ♘d5 25 h4 g4 26 ♘h2 h5 27 b3 ♕g6∞** Korchnoi-Cramling, Marbella 1999. **17...g5! 18 ♘b5? 18 a4!? 18...♕b7 19 a4 d5!∓ 20 exd5 exd5 21 ♗c3 d4 22 ♗d2 ♘d5 23 ♕e4 ♖af6 24 ♖a3 ♘7b6 25 ♖e2 ♘c4 26 ♖d3 ♘de3+! 27 ♖exe3 ♘xe3+ 28 ♖xe3 ♕xe4 29 ♖xe4 ♖xf3 30 ♗f4 ♖b3 31 ♗d6 ♖f5 32 g4 ♖d5 0-1** Stojanovic-Vuckovic, Valjevo 2000
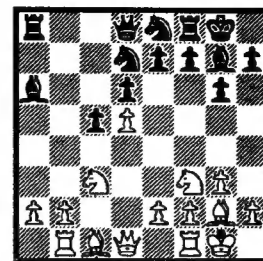
(21) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 e4 ♗xf1 8 ♔xf1 d6 9 ♘f3 ♘bd7 10 g3 ♗g7 11 ♔g2 0-0 12 ♖e1 ♕a5 12...♕c7!? 13 h3 ♖fb8 14 ♖e2 ♘b4 15 a3 ♖b6 16 ♗e3 ♕b7 17 ♖a2 e6 18 b4 exd5 19 exd5 ♖ba6 20 bxc5 dxc5 21 ♖ab2 ♖b6 22 ♖xb6 ♕xb6∞/± M.Gurevich-De Vreugt, Wijk aan Zee 2001

13 h3 13 e5 ♘g4 14 exd6 exd6 15 ♗f4 ♖fb8! 16 ♖e2 ♕a6 17 ♖c1 ♘ge5 18 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 19 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 20 b3 ♖b4 21 ♖d2 c4!∞ Van der Sterren - Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 1998 13...♖fb8 14 ♖e2 14 e5 dxe5 15 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 16 ♖xe5 ♖b7 17 ♕f3 (17 ♕e2!?) 17...♘e8! 18 ♖e2 ♘d6∞ Beliavsky-Leko, Cacak 1996 14...♘e8 15 ♖c2 ♘b6 16 ♕e2 ♕a6! 17 ♕g1? 17 ♕xa6 ♖xa6 18 ♘d2 f5! 19 f3 ♘a4 20 ♘d1∞ 17...♘a4! 18 ♕xa6 ♖xa6 19 ♘ge2 ♘c7 20 a3 f5! 21 f3 fxe4 22 fxe4 ♘xc3 23 ♘xc3 ♘b5 24 ♘xb5 ♖xb5 25 ♖c4? 25 ♖a2! ♖b3 26 ♖e2 ♖a4 27 ♗f4∞ Khalifman. 25...♗xb2∓ 26 ♖b1 ♖ab6 27 a4 ♖b3 28 a5 ♗xc1 29 ♖bxc1 ♖b2+ 30 ♖1c2 ♖6b5! 31 a6 ♖b6 32 e5 ♖xc2+ 33 ♖xc2 ♖xa6 34 exd6 exd6 35 ♖e2 ♔f7 36 ♖e6 c4 37 ♖e4 c3 38 ♖c4 ♖a3 39 ♔f3 c2+ 40 ♔e2 ♖a2 41 ♔e3 ♔f6 42 ♔d2 ♖a3 43 ♔xc2 ♖xg3 44 ♖e4 ♖xh3 45 ♖e6+ ♔f7 46 ♖xd6 ♔e7 47 ♖e6+ ♔d7 48 ♖a6 ♖h5 49 ♔c3 ♖xd5 50 ♖a7+ ♔e6 51 ♖xh7 g5 52 ♖h1 ♔f5 53 ♖f1+ ♔e4 54 ♖g1 ♔f3 55 ♔c4 ♖a5 0-1 Beliavsky-Khalifman, Linares 1995
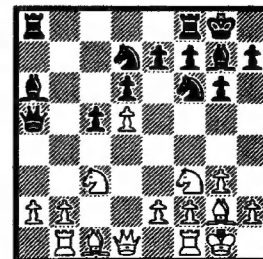
(22) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 g3 d6 8 ♗g2 ♘bd7 8...♗g7 9 ♘h3 0-0 10 0-0 ♘bd7 11 ♕c2 ♖a7 12 b3 ♕a8 13 ♖b1 ♖b8 14 ♖d1 ♖ab7 15 ♗d2 c4!∓ Aseev-Ponomariov, Ohrid 2001 9 ♘f3 ♗g7 10 ♖b1 10 0-0 ♘b6 11 ♖e1 0-0 12 ♘d2 ♕c7 (12...♘e8; 12...♖a7) 13 ♖b1 ♕b7? (12...♖fb8) 14 b4! cxb4 15 ♖xb4 ♕c7 16 ♗b2 ♖fb8 17 ♗a1! ♘c4

18 ♖xb8+ ♖xb8 19 ♘b3 ♕b6 20 ♕d4!+ – Grigore-Costantini, Cesenatico 2000 10...0-0 11 0-0 ♘e8

12 ♕c2 12 ♖e1!? ♗c4 (12...♘c7 13 e4 ♘b5 14 ♘e2!± Avrukh-Hendriks, Wijk aan Zee 2000)13 a3! (13 ♘d2? ♗xa2 14 ♘xa2 ♖xa2 ∓ Rowson-Vuckovic, Gibraltar 2004) 13...♘c7 14 e4 ♖b8 15 ♗f4 ♖b6 16 ♗h3 ♗b3 17 ♕c1 ♘f6 18 ♗h6 ♕a8 19 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 20 ♘d2 ♖fb8 21 ♗f1 ♘d7 22 f4 ♖6b7 23 ♘xb3 ♖xb3 24 ♗c4 ♖3b7 25 e5 ♘b6 26 exd6 ♘xc4 27 dxc7 ♖xc7 Drasko-Pikula, Novi Sad 2000 28 f5!? ↑ 12...♘c7 13 ♖d1 ♘b6 14 e4 ♘b5 15 ♘xb5 ♗xb5 16 b3 ♕c8 17 ♗g5 ♖e8 18 a4?! ♗xa4! 19 bxa4 ♗xa4 20 ♕c4 ♗xd1 21 ♖xd1 ♕a6! 22 ♕xa6 ♖xa6 23 ♗f1 ♖a1 24 ♖xa1 ♗xa1∞ Tregubov-Gharamian, Clichy 2004

(23) 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 ♘c3 ♗xa6 7 g3 d6 8 ♗g2 ♘bd7 9 ♘f3 ♗g7 10 ♖b1 0-0 11 0-0 ♕a5 11...♘b6 12 b3 ♖a7 13 ♖e1!? (13 a4 ♕a8 14 ♘h4 ♖b8 15 ♗b2 Piket-Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 1999 15...c4!?∞) 13...♘bd7 16 ♗a1! ♘c7 17 e4 ♘d7 18 ♘f3 ♘b5 19 ♘xb5 ♖xb5 20 e5!± Epishin-Schuurman Creon 2002.

12 ♗d2 ♖fb8 13 ♕c2 ♘e8 13...♕d8!? 14 ♖fd1 (14 b3!?) 14...♘b6 15 e4 ♘c4 16 ♗c1 ♕a5 17 b3 ♘g4 18 ♘a4 ♗b5! ↑

Malakhatko-Rakhmangulov, Alushta 2001; 13...♘g4 14 a4 ♘ge5
15 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 16 b3± Kramnik-Van Wely, Monte Carlo 2003. 14
♖fe1 ♘c7 15 a4! ♛b6 16 b3 ♗xc3? 16...♛a7∞ 17 ♗xc3 ♘xd5
18 ♘e5! ♘xe5 19 ♗xd5 ♗b7 20 ♗xb7 ♖xb7 21 ♗xe5 dxe5
22 ♖ec1 f6 23 ♛e4± Kramnik-Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 2003

* * * *

Definitions of Symbols

#	mate
+	check
+ +	double check
±	slight advantage for White
∓	slight advantage for Black
±	clear advantage for White
∓	clear advantage for Black
+-	decisive advantage for White
-+	decisive advantage for Black
=	equal game
!	good move
!!	excellent move
!?	move deserving attention
?!	dubious move
?	weak move
??	blunder
∞	with compensation
X	with an attack against...
Δ	with the idea of ...
⌂	better is ...
⇄	with counterplay
□	only move
↑	with initiative
∞	unclear
Ch	Championship
corr	correspondence game
ol	Olympiad
zt	Zonal Tournament
izt	Interzonal Tournament

Before the Fight

I hope this book has whetted your appetite for the Benko
Gambit and that you are feeling anxious to play it at the first
opportunity. Remember you will also need a defence prepared
against 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 ♘f3. Perhaps you will choose the
sharp but slighty risky 3...cxd4 4 ♘xd4 e5!? as played by Topalov
and the young Kasparov. Alternatively, you might settle for a
bishop fianchetto on g7 as the closest thing in spirit to the
Benko: 3...cxd4 4 ♘xd4 g6 5 ♘c3 ♗g7 and here you have to be
ready for both the Maroczy bind with 6 e4 and the English
mainline after say 6 g3 ♘c6 7 ♗g2 ♘xd4 8 ♛xd4 d6 9 0-0 0-0.
Anyone capable of mastering the Benko is bound to have the
necessary flair and skill to handle either of these set ups without
too much trouble – but do learn a little theory.

At first you should be satisfied with a basic repertoire in the
Benko, with only one answer to any of White's schemes; but
after you have gained some experience you should aim to have
at least two different replies to each set up, not only for the
sake of variety but also to prevent your opponent doing very
deep preparation against you.

When you play the Benko you set White the astonishingly
difficult task of exploiting the extra pawn: it is so difficult in fact
as to be virtually impossible, and for this reason many players
hand back the pawn as quickly as possible in return for a
positional, rather than a material, plus. You will need patience,
endurance and fighting spirit no matter what form the game
takes. It is a great consolation to know that Black is acting from
a sound positional base – the endgame is normally good for him

and the onus is therefore on White to 'do something'. This is too much pressure for most players, even Grandmasters, and the thing they 'do' is often horrendous.

Well it's goodbye now. Let me wish you happy hunting with the Benko in your tournaments and matches!

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